

IT'S YOUR Universe

YOU HAVE THE **POWER**
TO MAKE IT HAPPEN



ACTRESS, ENTREPRENEUR, AND ULTIMATE *fangirl*
ASHLEY ECKSTEIN

with STACY KRAVETZ

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Illustrations by ASHLEY TAYLOR



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About the Author



Introduction



THIS IS A NEW DAY, A NEW BEGINNING.

—**AHSOKA TANO**, *Star Wars Rebels*



Before you read this book, I need you to do one thing: throw out all your doubts and negative preconceptions about your dreams. This is the time to think about what you want to do, who you want to be, and what you want to achieve. Has anyone ever told you no or said that you couldn't achieve something? Has anyone ever squashed your dreams? If so, you are not alone. We all hear negative things at one time or another, but only *you* have the power to decide how it will affect you. It's OK if you've allowed the negative thoughts to creep in and sidetrack your dreams or put them on hold. But I'm here to tell you that it's never too late to make a change and forge a new path.

Allow yourself to have an open mind while reading this book, and silence the voice in your head that says, *No, you can't do that!* Get rid of the doubts about yourself and forget about what you may have been told in the past. Everything can be different if you let it.

First of all...

Don't let anyone tell you, "No, you can't."

And if you don't mind...

Please allow me to be the person to tell you, "YES, YOU CAN!"

My name is Ashley Eckstein. You may know me as an actress and the voice of Ahsoka Tano from *Star Wars*, or as the girl who started Her Universe, a fashion and lifestyle brand for fangirls. You may not know me and are reading this book because someone gave it to you as a gift or because you just picked it up at the bookstore. If so, you're probably wondering who I am and why I'm writing a book. Well, let me introduce myself. I am just an ordinary girl who was born into an ordinary life, who was raised in Orlando, Florida, and

who grew up loving Disney. And just like Belle from *Beauty and the Beast*, I dreamed of adventure in the great wide somewhere. I was not born into royalty or great wealth and opportunity. I had to work hard and earn everything that was ever given to me, but thanks to the lifelong influence and inspiration of Disney, I've been able to make my dreams come true. By sharing my story and what I've learned, I hope I can prove to you that the universe is truly yours to take hold of and that you have the power to make anything happen!

In this book, I will share my journey with you, from my years as a little girl growing up in Florida and dreaming of appearing on the Disney Channel; to becoming a Disney Parks cast member in high school; to being the voice of Ahsoka Tano in *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* and *Star Wars Rebels*; to starting my own company, Her Universe. The world of Disney taught me that "if you can dream it, you can do it," and I want to share that with you. I want to show you how to turn your dream into a reality.



Now, I know you're probably thinking that Disney came to me and hired me to write this book. Well, let me set the record straight right here: I actually approached Disney to ask if I could write this book. You see, Disney taught me to wish upon a star and inspired me to make my dreams come true.



Yes, there is such a thing as Disney magic, and it's available to everyone.


Anyone and everyone can experience Disney magic, and in the words of Walt Disney, "All our dreams can come true—if we have the courage to pursue them." If I can pass on to

you an ounce of what Disney gave to me, imagine how many dreams will come true!

Whenever I think of dreaming, I think of Cinderella. After her father passes away, her stepmother and stepsisters try to make her life miserable. They make her live in the attic and do all the cooking and cleaning. She dresses in old clothes and loses all the pleasures she previously enjoyed. However, there is one thing her stepmother does not have the power to take away: the ability to dream. What inspires me so much about Cinderella is that despite how bad things have gotten, she famously says, “They can’t order me to stop dreaming.”

When I was a little girl, Cinderella taught me that the power to dream comes from the heart. No one has the power to take away your ability to dream because it comes from within. Cinderella sings the song “A Dream Is a Wish Your Heart Makes,” and I want you to read and remember its lyrics—because your entire journey in making your dreams come true starts inside of you.



A decorative border featuring pink flowers and green vine-like swirls framing the text.

IN DREAMS YOU LOSE YOUR HEARTACHES
WHATEVER YOU WISH FOR, YOU KEEP
HAVE FAITH IN YOUR DREAMS AND SOMEDAY
YOUR RAINBOW WILL COME SMILING THROUGH
NO MATTER HOW YOUR HEART IS GRIEVING
IF YOU KEEP ON BELIEVING
THE DREAM THAT YOU WISH WILL COME TRUE



Growing up, I was never consistent about keeping a diary. I would try to write daily entries, but it never lasted for very long. However, I've always carried a journal with me, and I like to jot down my dreams, thoughts, ideas, favorite quotes, sketches, to-do lists—anything and everything! I write things down as they come to me, and there's no rhyme or reason to the order in which things appear in my journal.

I want you to use this book as your journal. I want you to write down your own wishes, dreams, lessons, fears, failures, and successes. This is where you can let your dreams and imagination run wild. Just as Alice from *Alice in Wonderland* allows the Cheshire Cat to guide her, you have this book to help you determine your path: *this way* or *that way*.

Your journey to making it happen starts right here, right now. You make the rules and you write your own happily ever after!

Dreaming* IS THE FIRST STEP IN *Doing

I believe that the first step to achieving your dreams is saying them out loud. Once you've put them out there, they already feel more real, more attainable. And if you hear yourself say them enough times, you'll begin to believe they are going to happen. When other people hear you say your dreams out loud, they will probably want to get on board and help you achieve them. That's the magic of throwing those wishes and dreams into the universe and letting everyone know what you want to do. Putting them out there gives them a life. They're not just in your head anymore. It's harder to have doubts about your dreams when you've heard yourself wish for them and say them out loud. Start now. Say one of your dreams out loud. I'm not joking! If you

are by yourself, talk to yourself (trust me, I do it all the time!). Or if someone else is in the room, start now by telling them one of your dreams.

Now that you've said it out loud, write all of your dreams down on a piece of paper! Don't hesitate, don't edit. Just write them down.





Chapter 1

WISH

**WHEN YOU WISH UPON A STAR MAKES NO DIFFERENCE WHO YOU
ARE ANYTHING YOUR HEART DESIRES WILL COME TO YOU**

—“WHEN YOU WISH UPON A STAR,”
Pinocchio



MY STORY BEGINS WITH *Disney*

When I was two years old, my family moved to Orlando, Florida, and my dad got a job at Walt Disney World as a meat and seafood buyer. I guess you could say that I grew up Disney. Because my dad was a cast member (the name given to every Disney employee at the parks), he and my mom had passes that allowed the whole family to get into the Disney Parks every day for free if we wanted.

Thankfully, my parents took full advantage of our access to the happiest place on Earth, and I feel like I was practically raised on Main Street, U.S.A. If you've never been to the Magic Kingdom at Disney World, Main Street, U.S.A. is the first of the many themed lands you encounter when you walk into the park. It's the idyllic setting of the perfect hometown. It's a place where families can just relax, be carefree, and feel at home. The shops, arcades, gas lamps, horse-drawn carriages, trolleys, barbershop quartets, balloons, hot dog stands, and ice-cream parlors made me feel safe and forget my worries. In fact, in order to get to Main Street, U.S.A., you have to walk through a stone archway under the train station with a plaque that reads [HERE YOU LEAVE TODAY AND ENTER THE WORLD OF YESTERDAY, TOMORROW AND FANTASY.](#)

My fondest memories as a little girl were made on Main Street, U.S.A. From watching parades to visiting Santa Claus every year at the base of a giant Christmas tree to watching countless firework displays, Walt Disney wanted Main Street, U.S.A. to represent the heart of America, and his dream formed the storybook outlook on life I developed as a child.

We were what some would call a middle-class family. During the day, my dad worked at Disney, and my mom was an elementary school teacher. At night, both worked part-time—my dad at a hotel and my mom at a grocery store—just to make ends meet for our family of six. We never had

extra, but my parents always made sure we had what we needed.

My parents are dreamers; they are living proof that with hard work, anything is possible. In fact, my parents went to Disney World on their honeymoon and my mom made a wish that they would start a family and that one day they would move to Orlando and my dad would work for The Walt Disney Company. They believed that with hard work, their dream would come true. And just a little over four years later, they moved to Florida and my dad got a job with Disney!



THIS IS MY DAD, TONY.

With the free access to Disney World, we went all the time. Since my mom is a teacher, she often used Disney World as our classroom; and that's where I learned several life lessons. Many nights, we would go to the Magic Kingdom as a family just to watch the fireworks.

My mom and I loved the movie *Pinocchio* and the song "When You Wish Upon a Star." It actually became my favorite song, and my mom used it to instill in me a belief that I have the power to make my own magic. She told me to

wish on one of the stars during the fireworks. She said my wishes would come true, and I believed her. It was during these evenings that my fascination with shooting stars and wishes began. There was always a particular moment during the fireworks when I'd make my wish. Halfway through the show, Tinker Bell would fly down from Cinderella Castle. She was so high up and so far away that, to me, she looked like a shooting star! Even to this day, it's such a magical moment. If they could make fairies fly right in front of my very eyes, then in my mind, anything was possible.



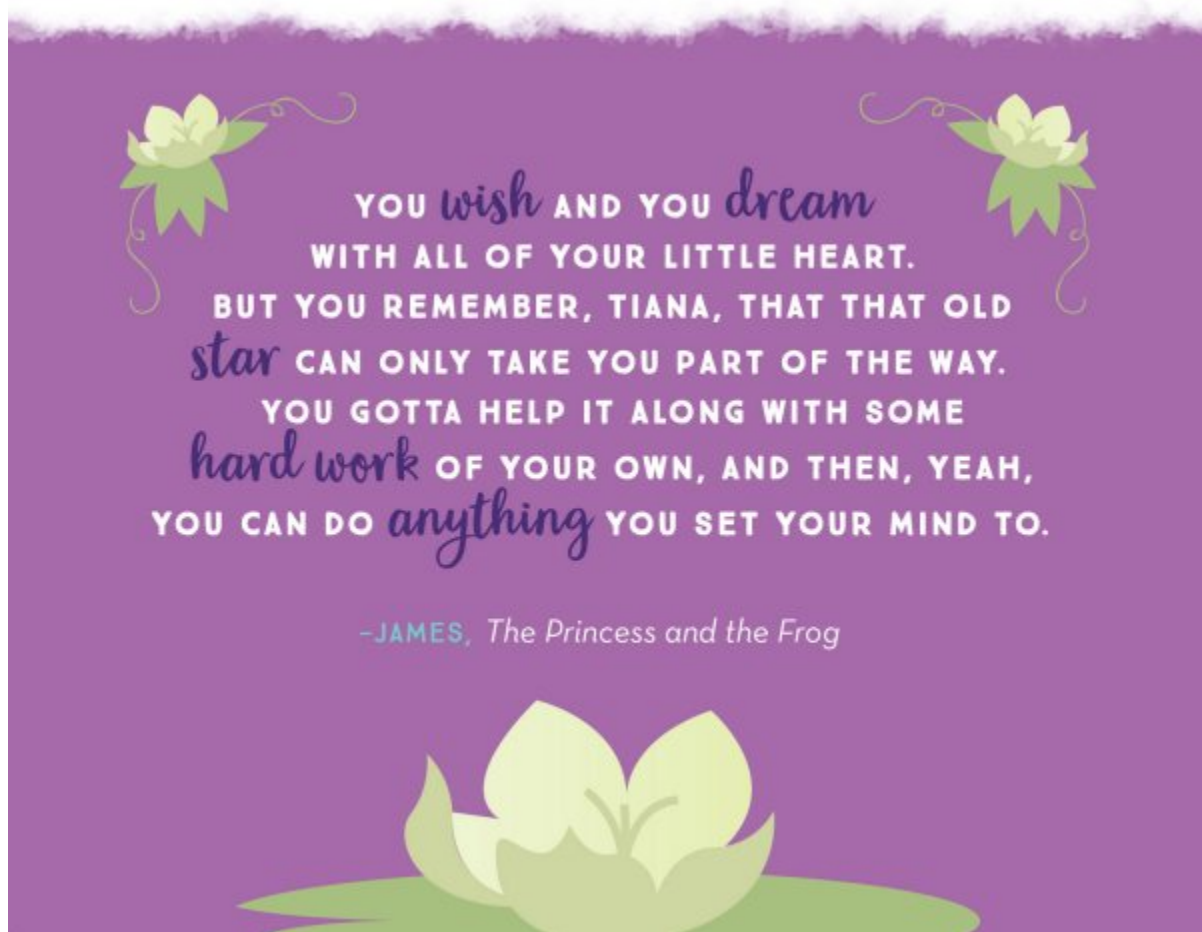
From the time I was two years old until I was nine, I made countless wishes upon stars, and I believed that those dreams I wished for would come true. Then (I remember it like it was yesterday), it was Christmas morning, and I was in third grade. My mom and dad gave me a baseball cap with a quote embroidered on the front: **DON'T DREAM IT. BE IT.**



Others may have seen just a baseball cap. But this gift from my parents was a symbol. I was old enough to learn a major life lesson.

They challenged me. They said all those wishes I made upon all those stars—well, those dreams could definitely come true, but I could not just sit back and wait for anything to fall in my lap.

I had to *do* it.



YOU *wish* AND YOU *dream*
WITH ALL OF YOUR LITTLE HEART.
BUT YOU REMEMBER, TIANA, THAT THAT OLD
star CAN ONLY TAKE YOU PART OF THE WAY.
YOU GOTTA HELP IT ALONG WITH SOME
hard work OF YOUR OWN, AND THEN, YEAH,
YOU CAN DO *anything* YOU SET YOUR MIND TO.

-JAMES, *The Princess and the Frog*

I had to work hard to make my dreams come true. This was a lesson that my parents taught by example. My dad was born into a hardworking Italian family. My great-grandparents had emigrated from Italy to Louisville, Kentucky, and opened their own grocery. As a little kid, my dad worked in the family store on the weekends. Then, when he was fourteen, he started a paper route and hand delivered newspapers to three hundred homes, twice a day, six days a week. He kept this up until his junior year of college, paying for his own private high school tuition, his own braces, his own college education, and his own car.

My mom's father, my grandfather, came from a very poor town in rural Kentucky. My grandfather spent the summers barefoot because they could afford only one pair of shoes

per year, and they needed those for the cold winters. They also couldn't afford electricity and had to rely on a fire to cook and keep them warm. Once my grandfather graduated from high school with no money and no options for college, he joined the army. Not only did he want to serve his country in World War II, he also knew that joining the military would allow him to eventually further his education. Through hard work and perseverance, he worked his way up to administrator of the roving hospital during the war.

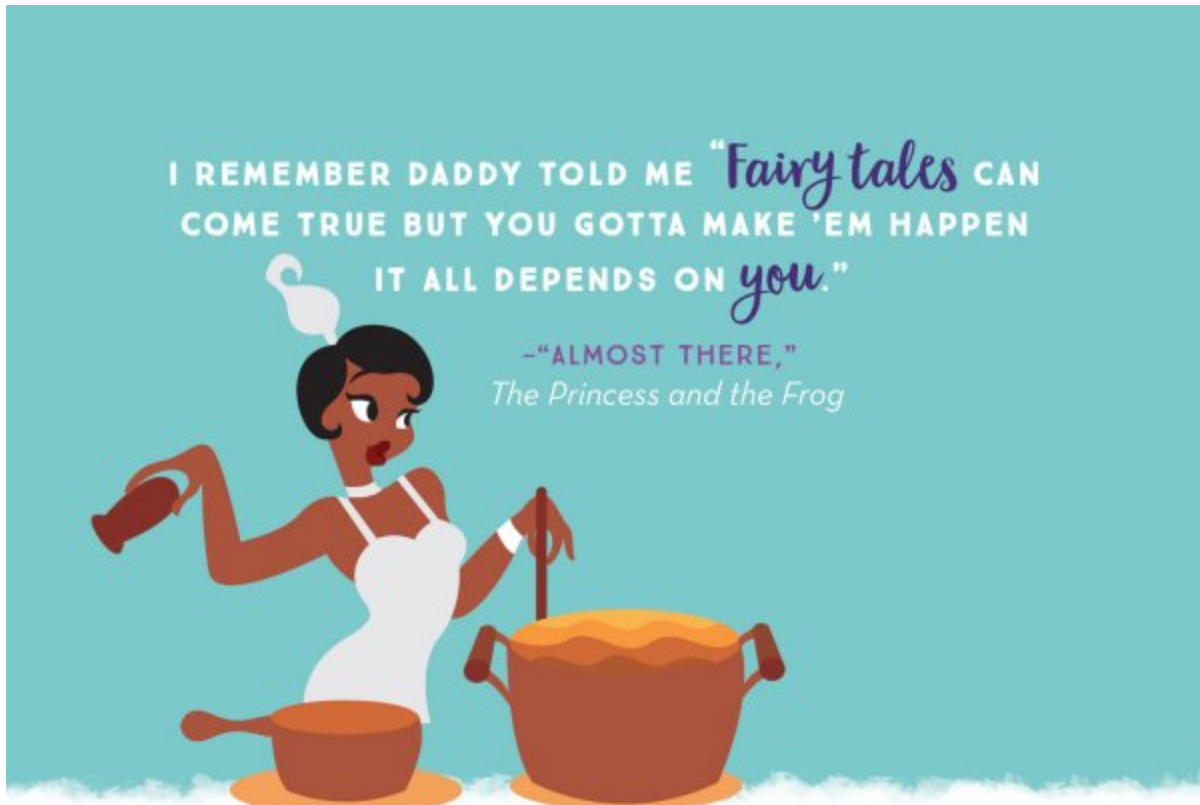


He ultimately earned his college degree and went on to hold a powerful and successful position at the railroad company in Louisville. My grandfather came from nothing and is living proof that you can transform any situation, and that anything is possible.

My grandparents met during the war. My grandmother was a selfless woman who was a physical therapist during the war and went on to work with polio patients. Because there was little information about polio at the time, many people were scared to get close to anyone who was exposed

to the disease. My grandmother risked being ostracized in order to help people in need.

Both of my parents saw this and adopted an incredible and tireless work ethic. And at nine years old, I was old enough to put that hat on and realize that dreaming wasn't enough. My journey to *be* it and *do* it began.



DISNEY WAS A FORM OF *Education*

My parents used Disney as a playground of opportunity for us. They sought out experiences tailored to our interests. You see, Disney makes magic happen right before your eyes, day in and day out. When you can actually see something magical happening in front of you, all of a sudden, the intangible becomes tangible.



THIS IS MY MOM, SHARON.

One of my earliest memories is of the week Hollywood Studios opened. Hollywood Studios was a new theme park and production studio that was part of Disney World, so not only could we visit the park, but we could also get an idea of how films and television shows were made.

We went as a family, and I remember walking down Hollywood Boulevard, the main street and entryway into Hollywood Studios, in awe. There was a shop where you could film your own movie scene. A crowd of people had gathered waiting for a chance to be on camera. The director chose our family to film a scene. My parents thought it would be a fun experience for us to make a pretend movie.

Was it super cheesy? Yes! Were we really bad in it? Yes! But it made movie magic happen in front of my eyes right there on Hollywood Boulevard. It made me believe that I could one day be a part of it!

Little did I know how soon I would *really* be a part of it.

As a kid, I loved the Disney Channel, and I dreamed of being on it myself. My favorite show was *The Mickey Mouse Club*. Every afternoon I would come home from school and turn on the television to watch the latest episode. There were kids my own age singing and dancing on television at Disney World! It was impossible to imagine. Were these real kids just like me? How had they gotten that opportunity? I had so many questions! It turned out that our next-door neighbor was a cameraman for *The Mickey Mouse Club*. He invited my family to a live taping of an episode, and suddenly, the magic that had only existed inside my television was real and right in front of me! They *were* real kids. They acted just like my friends and I did, and there they were, standing just feet away from me. A light bulb in my head went off: if they could do it, so could I! When we got home, I immediately asked my mom if I could start taking singing lessons and acting classes. If I wanted to be a Mouseketeer (that's what they called the kids in *The Mickey Mouse Club*), then I needed to practice!



THESE ARE MY SISTERS,
TARA AND TAYLOR.

DISNEY GAVE ME MY *First* ROLES

It was an amazing opportunity to watch a television show live from a seat in the audience. But soon I got to be in front of the camera, which was even better. One day, we found out that Disney cast members and their families would have the opportunity to be extras in the background of a Disney Channel special. The filming was taking place at night after the park closed, so it would last until long past my usual bedtime. But my mom knew how badly I wanted to be on the Disney Channel, and she wanted me to experience what it was really like to be an actress on a set. So she signed the two of us up, and off we went to EPCOT Center—after hours on a school night. We filmed until one A.M., which was definitely the latest I had ever stayed up. I still remember every detail of that night. It was hard work with long hours on set, standing and doing the same scene over and over again. Once again, the process became real, and thanks to Disney I got to experience what it actually takes to film a television show.

When the special aired on television, my mom and I were barely visible to anyone watching since we were just extras, but I remember the thrilling feeling I got when I saw the finished product. Even though I was in the background, I was on a television show! It was possible! At that point, I knew I wanted more, and I knew I had to do it again. I just hoped that next time, the audience would actually see me.

After two years of singing and acting lessons, I made it into the prestigious, audition-only Orlando Children's Opera Company. Whenever the Orlando Opera Company put on an opera that needed kids, they used our choir, but we also sang all sorts of other types of music.

We were often asked to perform at events, but I couldn't believe it when my choir was chosen to sing on the ABC holiday special *A Musical Christmas at Walt Disney World*. We would close out the special and sing with Mickey Mouse on Main Street, U.S.A. in front of the big Christmas tree. In my mind, my entire twelve years of life had led up to that moment: prime-time television.

Talk about dreams coming true!

Once again, we had to film after the park closed on a school night. My parents told me that if I wanted to go, I'd need to get my homework done before the shoot, and I'd still have to go to school the next day. They wanted me to have fun, but they also made it clear that I had responsibilities. With dreams comes hard work.

We had one song, and we had to sing it over and over and over again as they filmed the scene several different times to make sure they got all the footage they needed. Though it was a quick one-minute segment on the show, it took over three hours to film, and we finished at two A.M.

I'll never forget that night, because I was truly filled with a mixture of emotions. It was an amazing experience. Alongside Mickey Mouse, we were the only ones on Main Street, U.S.A. singing our hearts out with a breathtaking view of Cinderella Castle. However, by the time we left, I was utterly exhausted, and the wake-up call came early the next morning when I had to go to school. This was real life. It was a true professional opportunity, and my parents made sure I understood and upheld the responsibility that came with the fun.

I remember feeling proud of myself. That opportunity did not just fall in my lap. It had been over three years in the

making. It all started with my singing and acting lessons; then I had to try out for the children's choir. The choir practiced every weekend and, on top of that, we had additional rehearsals for the television special, and all the while, I had to keep up with my schoolwork. I felt like I'd earned it through hard work. I definitely understood what my parents had meant by *Dream it and do it!*



***Practice* MAKES PERFECT—DO SOMETHING EVERY DAY!**

When Mulan disguises herself as a man to take her father's place in the Imperial army, she is able to fool others with her appearance, but not with her skills. Mulan's father has been conscripted to rejoin the army, but he is old and disabled, and Mulan knows he would never make it out of battle alive. So, although only men are allowed to fight, Mulan secretly leaves her home in the middle of the night and reports for duty as the representative for her family, "Ping." She is far from being a skilled warrior, and part of the

film follows Mulan at training camp as she practices daily with her fellow recruits. Her commanding officer has set a particular challenge for the new soldiers: climbing to the top of a giant pole with two heavy weights and retrieving an arrow at the top. The weights symbolize strength and discipline, two qualities needed to be a warrior.

Mulan knows she is a warrior on the inside, but proving it on the outside seems impossible. In the beginning, she fails at every drill. She's weak, clumsy, slow, and on the verge of giving up. The captain even dismisses her from service and tells her to go home. But that night, Mulan makes up her mind that she is finally going to make it to the top of the pole. She grabs the weights and begins to climb. Soon, she realizes the weights aren't just there to drag her down—she can actually use them to help her get to the top! She continues to climb, higher than she ever had before. But when she's nearly reached the arrow, she begins to slide back down. However, she has come too far, and her new understanding of strength and discipline will not let her fail. She stops her fall, regains her grip, gives it everything she has, and pulls herself to the top! She grabs the arrow and throws it down to the ground, proving to herself and to her captain that she belongs. From that point on, we begin to see Mulan's skills improve, proving that practice really does make perfect. She begins to excel in every exercise and strives to be the best at everything she does. By the time training is over, Mulan and all the other new recruits have become highly skilled soldiers!

So, what about you? What is your dream? Do you want to be an artist? A singer? A scientist? A designer? A professional athlete? I challenge you to do at least one thing every day that gets you closer to that goal. For example, when I wasn't at my lessons or rehearsing with my choir, I practiced singing in my room. I made sure there was never a

day when I didn't sing at least one song or practice my vocal exercises. Mulan is far from ready for battle when she first reports for duty, but she practices her training exercises every day to improve her skills.

You don't need an organized practice or classroom to get closer to your dream. Challenge yourself to practice your skills every day. There's no secret or magical solution to improvement. Practice and repetition will improve your abilities. Write down your practice plan on a piece of paper. What are you going to do every day?



When I was growing up, I wanted to work for Disney just like my dad. It was my dream to be a Disney cast member. At the time, you had to be sixteen years old to work for Disney, and I was literally counting down the days until I could apply for a job. I wanted to be a part of the magic. I dreamed of being in entertainment and being a performer at Disney World.

Finally, the day came. Almost like a page out of a fairy tale, Disney was having tryouts for new entertainment cast members on my sixteenth birthday. I couldn't have scripted it better myself! It was a Saturday, and I woke up bright and early to audition. We each had to fill out an application and

learn a simple dance move. It was really easy, and all my years of acting and dance classes had prepared me for that moment. I found out later that day that I had been selected to begin the process of becoming a cast member.

It was the best birthday present anyone could have given me!

My wish had come true, and I was ready to dance down Main Street, U.S.A. in the Main Street Electrical Parade! You see, I had made a wish when I was a little girl to be in that parade. My mom had bought me and my siblings the parade soundtrack, and we'd play it on our living room stereo and dance to the songs for hours. In my mind, it was all happening just as I had planned. It was that easy, right?

Well...that's when I learned another big ol' life lesson.

At the orientation for newly hired cast members, I found out that I would not get to pick my role or the park where I would work. Instead of the Magic Kingdom, I was automatically assigned to Hollywood Studios. And I was certainly not going to be a dancer in the Main Street Electrical Parade, as I had wished. I wasn't going to be a performer at all—I'd just be assisting the other entertainers. What??? This had not been the plan!

I found out I'd have to go to another audition later on to even be considered for a parade, and for now I had to spend my weekends at Disney doing a job that I did not want. This was not what I'd thought I was signing up for! However, I'd already accepted the job, and the only way to get out of my situation was to quit. I couldn't believe it. I had wished upon a star to be a dancer in the Main Street Electrical Parade, the stars had aligned, and I'd been hired on my sixteenth

birthday—but now my dreams were crashing down around me.

Do you remember when Cinderella first thinks she is going to the ball? By royal command, every eligible maiden is to attend the ball, and that means Cinderella, too. Cinderella's stepmother says that Cinderella can only attend the ball if she gets all her chores done and finds something to wear. Excitedly, Cinderella agrees. She finishes every single one of her chores, and her animal friends help her turn an old dress of her mother's into a beautiful gown using leftover scraps they find around the house. When it's finally time to go to the ball, Cinderella joins her stepmother and stepsisters—only to have her dreams dashed when her stepsisters rip her dress to shreds because they see that it's been altered using beads and pieces of fabric that had previously been theirs. How can Cinderella attend the ball now? Sure, she *could* still attend, but she's wearing rags, and this is not what she imagined!

This is how I felt about my new job at Disney World. Just like Cinderella, I'd dreamed of going to the ball. Now I'd found that I could still go, but there would be no ball gown, no prince, and certainly no dancing. I wanted to run away in tears like Cinderella, but I knew I could not quit my job at Disney without even trying. Reluctantly, I showed up on my first day of work, and sure enough, it was not what I'd had in my mind. They gave me an oversized collared shirt and khaki pants that were two sizes too big. The outfit was *not* cute, and it was certainly not the parade costume I had dreamed of. What's more, I was the youngest person there, and I didn't know anyone. Although I'm usually pretty outgoing, I spent my breaks and lunch hour by myself because I didn't feel comfortable walking into a break room full of adults I didn't know and asking to sit with them. And instead of making kids smile in the parade, I had to assist

costumed characters who actually scared a lot of the kids! I found myself dealing with crying children and upset parents. Needless to say, my journey at Disney did not start out so magical.



I was at a crossroads. I did not want to give up on my dream, but I honestly hated my job. I dreaded going to work. Thankfully, an audition notice was soon posted for a new show at Hollywood Studios that I could try out for. If I got it, they would move me to that job.

I went to the audition, learned some simple dance moves, and got called back. At the callback, it was just me and a small group of other girls. We had to learn a longer dance this time, and I felt like it went really well. The casting

directors seemed to like me, and I had a feeling I was a front-runner for the role. We went out to the lobby while the casting team deliberated. After a few minutes, I was called back into the room and told I was being cut. What???

I had not made the show after all.

I was devastated. However, the casting directors let me know that they really liked me and that the only reason I'd been cut was that they needed to hire full-time cast members who could work Monday through Friday. I was still in high school and was able to work only on weekends, so I was not eligible for a part in the show. I was crushed! I was thinking, *Why didn't they say that before I auditioned? I got my hopes up for nothing! Will all the parades and shows be like this? Is there any hope for me?*

Then they told me that there would be more auditions and that I should come back and try out for something else, because not all the shows and parades required full-time work. *Whew! There is hope!*

Even though I was disappointed that I hadn't been cast in the show and had to go back to the job I was not happy with, I felt like I'd been shown a path and given direction on how to make my dream come true, so I was also excited. After making it so far in the audition process, I knew I had the talent and just needed to be patient and find the right role. From that point on, I looked forward to going to work. I would show up at every new shift and check the board for auditions that I could attend.

Dream IT, Do IT

Finally, they held auditions for open roles in the Hercules—Zero to Hero Victory Parade at Hollywood Studios. This was it: my chance to be in a parade! At the audition, the casting directors asked me to try out for a cheerleader role. *Yikes!* I had never been a cheerleader before. Would I have to tumble or do flips? I immediately doubted myself and worried that I wouldn't be able to do the moves. However, I wanted this so badly, and I did not want to go back to my other job. This was what I had dreamed of doing my whole life.

I took a deep breath, reminded myself of the quote "If you can dream it, you can do it," and I quietly told myself, "Yes, you can!"

We had an hour to learn the dance, and I practiced my butt off. Thankfully the only tumbling move we had to do was a cartwheel, and I could do that, no problem. I'm not a quick learner, and sometimes it takes me twice as long to learn something as the person next to me. But I didn't worry about the other dancers. I focused on myself, my moves, my audition.

Finally, it was my group's turn to try out. I was so nervous. I felt that I had perfected the dance in practice, but would I be good enough? Would they be able to tell I wasn't really a cheerleader? But I was determined. I erased all doubt from my mind, put on the biggest smile I could muster up, and performed the dance flawlessly.

After everyone had danced, they called in my group and let me know that I had made it. I had been cast as a cheerleader in the Hercules parade, and it was time to begin rehearsals for my new role. My dream was finally coming true.



I AM ON MY WAY
I CAN GO THE DISTANCE
I DON'T CARE HOW FAR
SOMEHOW, I'LL BE STRONG
I KNOW EVERY MILE
WILL BE WORTH MY WHILE
I WOULD GO MOST ANYWHERE
TO FIND WHERE I BELONG



—“GO THE DISTANCE,” HERCULES

It was almost like fate that I was in the Hercules parade. I loved the song “Go the Distance,” and the message in the lyrics really resonated with me. I had always felt like I was meant to dance in a parade, but my journey to get there had not been direct. I was proud of myself that I’d kept going and hadn’t given up, and I was so grateful for the opportunity. I had worked hard and earned the spot I longed for. I would soon be spending my weekends dancing down Hollywood Boulevard, making kids smile. The path I’d taken as a Disney Parks cast member was not what I had originally envisioned, but I wouldn’t change it. It was not the Main Street Electrical Parade at the Magic Kingdom, but I seemed to have a special connection with Hollywood Studios. From the first “movie” I filmed at the shop on Hollywood Boulevard to my part in the parade, it seemed to be my park, my place of firsts. Little did I know then that those firsts would continue throughout my life.



When I wasn't working at Hollywood Studios, I was acting in plays at my high school and local theater. Years of lessons were paying off, and I was earning roles like Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz* at my community theater. However, I yearned for more. They were no longer filming any of the Disney Channel shows in Orlando, so the only way I could make my dream of *really* being on the Disney Channel come true was to go to Los Angeles. I had friends whose parents would fly them out to Los Angeles for auditions while we were still in high school, and I begged my mom for the same opportunity.

Unfortunately, both my parents worked, and I had two younger siblings at home whom my parents could not leave. My mom said I could move to Los Angeles when I was old enough to go by myself; in the meantime, she encouraged me to take advantage of all the local opportunities and make the most of my current situation. I took her advice and built up my acting résumé by working as an extra or getting small parts in commercials and TV shows that came to Florida to film episodes at Disney World.



I then discovered that a significant chapter in my life was about to come to a close. My dad was offered a new job in Memphis, Tennessee, and he was leaving Disney. Meanwhile, I was about to graduate from high school. Looking back, I see that I was like Rapunzel. I had been in my safe tower, my comfort zone of Orlando, Florida, but in order to see the lights of the real Hollywood, the lights of the Disney Channel, I needed to leave and begin a new chapter of my life.

High school ended and I moved to Cincinnati, Ohio, where I trained at an intensive acting conservatory. It was a very prestigious program, and I was extremely lucky to be accepted. Out of several hundred applicants, they chose only twelve students. However, the training was more focused for a career in theater, and I wanted a career in film and television. I knew in my heart that I was not in the right place. On my spring break, my mom, my cousin Kevin (who was also an actor), and I took a trip to Los Angeles to check out the city. It was my dream to move to Los Angeles to be on the Disney Channel, but what if I hated it? I had only seen LA in photos or on film. I hoped LA would be as magical in real life as it was in my dreams, but I had to go there to find out for myself.

It was just like in *Tangled*. Rapunzel has waited her entire life to see the floating lanterns, but once she gets there, she's terrified. She says, "What if it's not everything that I dreamed it would be?"

Los Angeles was definitely bigger than any city I had ever been to! It was much busier than Orlando and had a lot more traffic. However, I was in the land of opportunity, the city where so much of what I saw on television and in the movies was filmed, and it was calling my name. We reached out to every contact and friend we knew from Florida and set up meetings to say hello and get advice about breaking in to the entertainment industry. A casting director I knew from Orlando now worked for a television network in LA. I met with her, and she said that if I moved to Los Angeles, she would help me get started and be there for me whenever I needed advice. I went to lunch with my mom and my cousin afterward, and we decided that the time was right. This was my chance, and I had to move to LA to pursue my dreams. However, reality suddenly hit me as I realized my parents both had jobs and I had two younger siblings in school in Memphis. I would have to move to LA by myself. Yikes!

I was getting what I had wished for, but the thought of being by myself in a big city like LA was very scary. I was reminded of Mulan and Hercules, who both left home by themselves. They were scared, but their hearts told them they had to go, and mine was telling me the same thing. I went to Cincinnati, packed up my stuff at the conservatory, and then went back home with my parents to plan my move. I found a place to live, and we bought a used Toyota Corolla from a friend. Then, with only a little bit of money to my name and a heart full of dreams, I packed up my Toyota with as much of my life as I could take with me and drove across the country with my dad.



WHERE DOES YOUR *Story* BEGIN?

We all start at square one. It's the first step we take in achieving our wishes and dreams. But where is that square? It's different for everyone.

Sometimes there's that light bulb moment where you just *know*. You know there's something you were meant to do in the world. Or you come across that one thing you love more than anything else. But that doesn't happen in such an obvious way for everyone. Just like Alice in Wonderland, sometimes we may wander down one path, find our way to an alternate path, and decide that maybe going backward and left and right again is the right way to do it this time.

Your story begins where *you* choose to begin telling it. You may have some parts that don't make the final edit, and that's OK. Your story begins when you start your journey toward achieving your dreams. Maybe that was a year ago or ten years ago, or maybe that's tomorrow. It's up to you to decide what story you want to tell, and it's OK if it changes along the way. In fact, it probably will change, just like mine did. Just keep going and keep refining and discovering

where you want your path to take you, and there will be no wrong move.



WE ALL CAN FIND THAT DISNEY *Magic*

Now I know you might be thinking that I was lucky to have grown up in Orlando with all these opportunities in my backyard. What if you live in a different state, or in a small town, and never have the opportunity to go to Disney?

As I said before, you do not have to go to Disneyland or Disney World to experience Disney magic in your life. Look up at the sky and you will see that we are all looking at the same stars. Whether you are standing on Main Street, U.S.A., somewhere in Middle America, or in Australia, anyone can

wish upon a star. Next time you see a star, I want you to make a wish. Then you should seek out opportunities in your town to experience what you're wishing for—places where your dreams can happen right in front of your eyes. Do you want to be an actress? Go volunteer at your local theater or take an acting class. Do you want to be a writer? Go to your local newspaper and ask to meet one of the editors, or ask if they have an internship program. Do you want to be a lawyer? Call your local law office and ask one of the lawyers about her journey. Seek out someone or something connected to what you want to do and experience it for yourself. Make it real; make it tangible!



You **CONTROL YOUR** *destiny-*
YOU DON'T NEED MAGIC
TO *do* **IT.**

-MERIDA, *BRAVE*



Now it's your turn. I want you to brainstorm all the things you can do in your town to experience your dreams. Whether that means people you want to meet or reach out to, events you want to attend, or even places you want to volunteer, it all starts by saying it out loud, getting it down on paper, and making a plan.





*The most fantastic, magical things
can happen, and it all starts
with a wish!*

—Jiminy Cricket, *Wishes: A Magical Gathering of Disney Dreams*
Nighttime Spectacular (the Magic Kingdom fireworks show that ran at
Walt Disney World from 2003 to 2017)

I am always making wishes, and they're not always on stars. I think making wishes regularly is a good habit because it's a reminder to keep on dreaming. I was born on September 22, and 22 is my favorite number. I'm not sure why, but I often find myself randomly looking at the clock at exactly 9:22 A.M. or P.M. Even

though I don't deliberately try to look at the clock at that time, this happens a couple times a week. Whenever it does, I make a wish. It seems like a lucky sign, like the universe is telling me to keep on believing. Do you make wishes on things other than stars?





**WHY, SOMETIMES I'VE BELIEVED AS MANY AS SIX IMPOSSIBLE
THINGS BEFORE BREAKFAST.**

—THE WHITE QUEEN, *Through the Looking-Glass*

If you know me, then you know that I'm *obsessed* with *Alice in Wonderland*. If you didn't know that about me yet, then now you do! Did I mention I'm obsessed with *Alice in Wonderland*?

Almost by accident, Alice became my favorite character; maybe it's because I looked like her. When we were young, my sister and I dressed up as our favorite Disney characters on a daily basis. My mom bought me a dress and shoes like Alice's to wear when we played because it seemed like the natural choice—I already had the long blond hair and blue eyes. Then people started to give me things related to Alice, like toys and dolls, for my birthdays or Christmas. By the time I reached middle school, I had a pretty big *Alice in Wonderland* collection that I continued to build on my own. Fast-forward to today: I have turned parts of my house and office into Wonderland! I collect tea sets, dolls, art, furniture, books, and anything and everything related to Alice. My collection makes me happy, and the story of *Alice in Wonderland* continues to inspire me every day!

When I was a little girl, I even shared some of Alice's personality traits. I was always very curious, and my imagination knew no bounds. Just like Alice, I would often dream and imagine a world of my own. My absolute favorite Alice quote actually comes from the follow-up novel by Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass*. When Alice says she can't believe impossible things, the White Queen tells her that she just needs practice: "Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast." This quote has had a major impact on me because, in our house,

we were taught to believe that nothing was impossible. In fact, we were often reminded of the Walt Disney quote, “It’s kind of fun to do the impossible.” So, in my mind, nothing was impossible!

However, I was also taught that everything takes practice. Just like a sport or an instrument, practice makes perfect. As the White Queen says, you have to practice believing in the impossible—and that’s what makes it become possible. This quote reminds me to believe in the impossible every day. You eat breakfast every morning, right? Then you should believe in the impossible every morning. Doubt can creep into your mind quickly, and the only way to stamp it out is to overcome it with belief!

It’s your turn again. On a piece of paper, write down six impossible things you are believing in today. If you’ve already eaten breakfast, that’s OK; believing in the impossible works any time of day!

TO *Wonderland* AND BEYOND

In March of 2001, I was living my own real-life version of *Alice in Wonderland*. My dad drove me out to Los Angeles, moved me into the room I was renting, and flew back to Tennessee. I remember dropping him off at the airport, and just like that, I was by myself. LA might as well have been Wonderland. It was a strange place full of interesting

characters, and I was now all alone trying to figure out whether to go this way or that way.

I was several steps closer to my dream of being an actress on the Disney Channel, but I was terrified! I was overwhelmed, and I wanted to just sit in my room and cry. I missed home; I missed my parents; I missed the safety of Main Street, U.S.A. and everything I'd known and trusted. Just like Alice, I cried a sea of tears and got my worries and emotions out. Had I made the right decision, or had I just made a big mistake?

Then I calmed myself down, and just like Alice, I decided to give myself some good advice. I realized that I needed to make a plan. Eventually I hoped I'd start making enough money as an actress to pay my bills, but until then, step one was getting a job. And step two was getting an acting agent.

I decided to wake up each morning and set one goal for the day. Then I'd need to do my very best to achieve that goal every single day. I started out by searching for a job I could do at night so I could go on auditions during the day. I applied for—and was turned down by—several different places. This was not as easy as becoming a Disney cast member when I was sixteen! Finally, I got a job as a barista at a coffee shop, where I worked the night shift from five P.M. to midnight.

Now that I had a job, I needed to find an agent. My friend from Florida had given me a list of acting agents that would be a good fit for me, which narrowed down my search. Now, I'm a rule follower, but this is when I learned a valuable lesson that Anakin Skywalker eventually teaches Ahsoka Tano: Some rules are meant to be broken.

Anakin tells Ahsoka, "You're reckless, little one. You never would have made it as Obi-Wan's Padawan, but you might make it as mine." Anakin is known to bend the Jedi rules to get the end result he needs, and he sees the same quality in Ahsoka.

All the agencies had a rule that you were not supposed to drop off your head shot, résumé, and acting reel in person. They asked you to mail them in with a cover letter, and if they were interested, they would get back to you. I knew that my package would get buried in stacks of submissions of other actors, so I figured out a way to get my information directly into the hands of the agents—or at least on the tops of their stacks. I was nineteen, but I legitimately looked thirteen years old. So I dressed myself in the youngest-looking outfit I could find, went to the agencies by myself,

and dropped off my information in person. My theory was that they could not get mad at a kid! I acted very professional and polite and asked the receptionists if they could give my package to the agent. In some cases, they brought the agent out to meet me right then and there.

My biggest asset in trying to get an agent was that I was legally an adult, but I could play a kid. Have you ever noticed that some actors are a lot older than the age they play on television? Especially actors on the Disney Channel? That's because there are a lot of different rules and laws in place to protect child actors. If an actor is under the age of eighteen, they can work only eight hours a day, and three of those hours must be spent in school. This law protects kids from being overworked, but it really limits the amount of working time on set for the rest of the crew. If they can find an actor who is eighteen or over but looks like a kid, they have fewer rules and restrictions to follow.

I thought that if I could only get in front of these agents so they could see how young I looked, they would definitely want to sign me. Lucky for me, my tactic worked. I was able to sign with an agency after only one month of living in LA.

It's really important to understand your strengths and what sets you apart from the rest of the group. When Alice meets the Caterpillar in Wonderland, he asks her, "Who are you?" But Alice has changed so much in Wonderland that she's too confused to answer him. However, the Caterpillar is giving Alice some very valuable advice! It's important to know who you are and what makes you unique.

On a piece of paper, write down a list of traits that make you YOU! How can you explain to someone else who you are if you don't know first?

Once I had my job at the coffee shop and an agent, I just had to wait for my phone to ring and for the auditions to get set up. Some weeks were busy with multiple auditions, and some weeks were dead with nothing going on. I had to stay focused, stick with my plan, and set a goal for myself each and every day. I made a list of everyone who had ever given me a business card and told me to call if I had any questions. This was another valuable life lesson I learned:

IT'S OK TO *ask* QUESTIONS.

In fact, I learned that people genuinely want to help others. No one achieves great success by themselves. There are always other people who help along the way. It feels good to return a favor or pay it forward to another person in need. I was in a position where I needed help. I needed advice on how to become an actress and make my dream of being on the Disney Channel come true. I had a list of about twenty-five people, and I called all twenty-five. I was shocked when every single person on my list got back to me and agreed to meet me in person or talk to me over the phone! I met with everyone from network executives to business owners, producers, fellow actors, casting directors, and family friends.

Alice journeys through Wonderland meeting all the different characters, like the Cheshire Cat, the Mad Hatter, and the March Hare, and gaining advice on where to go and what to do; and now I had to do the same thing. Every character in Wonderland gives Alice good advice. Some of it makes sense and some of it doesn't, but all of it eventually points her in the direction she needs to go. All my contacts had jobs in the entertainment industry, and I was able to take bits and pieces of their valuable feedback to make a plan for my own path in entertainment.

Make a list of people whom you would like to reach out to and ask questions. One rule of thumb someone once taught me is that it's OK to politely and respectfully reach out once a week until they get back to you. Remember, persistence is key! However, more than once a week is too much and may turn people off.

***Expect* BUMPS IN THE ROAD**

What most people don't realize, and what celebrities don't often tell you in their glamorous social media posts, is that acting is a business of rejection. For every one hundred auditions I went on, I got one job. I was fortunate to book some jobs right away, but I was rejected a lot. However, I feel this is true for any profession.

Whatever your journey may be, rejection is inevitable.

Whether it's applying to colleges or applying for jobs, chances are that you are not going to get accepted everywhere. I can't even begin to tell you how many times I was told no, and sometimes I wished the casting directors had stopped at just no. I heard everything: *No, because you're not pretty enough. No, because you're not tall enough. No, because you're too tall. No, because you look too old. No, because you're not ugly enough. No, because you're not exotic enough. No, because you're too average. No, because you're not talented enough....*

Dealing with rejection was my biggest obstacle in believing.

This is why my exercise of believing in six impossible things before breakfast every morning is so important. You *must* combat the negative with the positive.

NO ONE, AND I MEAN NO ONE, CAN TAKE AWAY YOUR POWER TO *believe*.

As I got into a regular routine of auditions, I started booking some jobs. I was cast as a lead in a television movie that I filmed for six weeks in Canada, and then I came back to Los Angeles and was cast as a lead in a new TV series. I was able to quit my job at the coffee shop and be a full-time actress. I hadn't booked a job with Disney yet, but with a growing résumé, I hoped it would only be a matter of time before that happened.

I actually felt like Aladdin! It was like I had my own genie who'd granted my wish of becoming a full-time actress, and now I was living the life of my dreams. Remember the song "A Whole New World"? Well, I felt like I was on a magic carpet ride, like I was the shooting star, like I was soaring to

a whole new world. And the best part was that I wasn't dreaming—it was real life!

Then my magic carpet began tumbling and freewheeling from the top of the sky to the bottom of the ocean. Lucky for Aladdin, the magic lamp is in his hat and falls with him when Jafar's men throw him in the water, never to be seen again. Aladdin is able to rub the lamp just in time, and the Genie saves him. I had no such genie and no such luck. The TV movie I'd filmed was not well received by critics, and the series I was on was canceled after seven episodes. I was back to being an unemployed actress and back to auditioning. At that point, my magic carpet ride felt like it would always be just a dream.

Luckily, pilot season was beginning, which is the time of year when television producers and studios cast all the new series for the fall season. It's a busy time with a ton of auditions, and I was ready. I was now twenty-one, but I still looked fifteen, and I was called back for several high school roles. On the final week of pilot season, I had auditions for three different series. I was once again reading for a lead role, and it was down to me and one other girl for each of the three shows. I figured with the law of averages, I would at least get one of the shows...but I didn't get any of them. They picked the other girl each time. Needless to say, I was devastated.

Pilot season was now over. I'd gotten so close and ended up with nothing.

When my agent called the next day, I was feeling really down. The last thing I wanted to do was open myself up for

more disappointment. Then he told me that I had an audition for a character on a new Disney Channel series called *That's So Raven*. The role was just for one episode, but if all went well, it might turn into more. I couldn't believe it. I was still heartbroken over the ride of rejection I had just dealt with, but this was the moment I had been waiting for my whole life! This was the reason I had moved to LA!

I had a few hours to practice my lines, and for some reason I felt unusually connected to this character—which is funny, because she was the opposite of who I was in real life. Her name was Muffy, and she was a bully. Perhaps all the pent-up anger and frustration I was feeling over the lost roles helped me bring some extra attitude to my performance. I mustered up every ounce of energy and confidence I had left in me and gave the audition everything I had. It went really well. I made the casting directors laugh out loud with my interpretation of the character, because I gave her a really high-pitched voice and an obnoxious laugh. I took a risk and gave Muffy an over-the-top personality. My risk was either going to pay off or send me back to the bottom of the ocean like Aladdin.

Well, it paid off, because I got the part! Just like my favorite song, “When You Wish Upon a Star,” says:

LIKE A BOLT OUT OF THE BLUE
FATE STEPS IN AND SEES YOU THROUGH
WHEN YOU WISH UPON A STAR
YOUR DREAMS COME TRUE.

I immediately got to work on *That's So Raven*, and it was a better experience than I ever imagined it could be. We rehearsed for a week and then filmed the episode in front of

a live audience. At the end of the taping, I took a moment to reflect. I looked out into the audience and saw that it was full of young girls. It took me back to when I'd been a little girl sitting in the audience of the live taping of *The Mickey Mouse Club*, when I'd first wished to be an actress on the Disney Channel.

As I stood there taking my bow in front of an audience full of young girls with stars in their eyes, I made a new wish: that I could pay it forward and make other girls believe their dreams could come true, too.

My character was part of a group of mean girls whose names were Alana, Muffy, and Loca. They were all very different and quirky, and they caused havoc at the school. However, they never got their way in the end. As actresses, we all just clicked, and our characters became fan favorites. Thankfully, they made us recurring characters, and we came back throughout the series over the course of four seasons.

I later found out that if I had booked any of the other series I'd been rejected for, I would not have been able to audition for *That's So Raven*. None of those series ended up making it to television, yet the one episode of *Raven* turned into nine episodes over the course of four years and made my dream of being an actress on the Disney Channel come true. It was a huge reminder to me that everything happens for a reason.

YOU NEVER KNOW WHAT CAN *Happen*

Little did I know that my life was about to change. I was about to embark on a journey I didn't even think was possible. In fact, I hadn't even thought to wish for it...but let me start at the beginning.

Most of the acting I did was on camera for film or television, but I really wanted to get into voice acting, too. Voice acting, or voice-over work, is when an actor performs the voice of an animated character or announcer. Whenever you hear narration in a movie trailer, a promo for a television show, or a radio commercial, that's a voice actor reading the lines. I was introduced to the world of voice acting through my fascination with the voices of the Disney Princesses, and it was one of my dreams to be the voice of an animated character.

I was particularly inspired by Jodi Benson, the voice of Ariel in *The Little Mermaid*, because *The Little Mermaid* was the first Disney Princess movie I saw in the theater. It was my seventh birthday, and there was a special advance screening of the film just for Disney cast members and their family and friends. Since this was such a special opportunity, I turned the screening into my birthday party and brought my friends with me to see the movie. It hadn't been released to the public yet. In fact, there were parts of the film that were still in black and white. It was such a cool experience to see what an animated movie looks like before it's finished. I *loved* the movie, and I really loved Ariel and the song "Part of Your World." That's when I first made the connection that there were people voicing the animated characters that I saw onscreen.

I'd grown up and begun my acting career, and I wanted to be just like Jodi Benson. The only problem was that I had

no experience in voice-over work. While voice acting is acting, the technique is completely different. You have to stand still in front of a microphone while you perform your lines. You have to convey all your emotions and body movements purely through your voice. Thankfully, my voice sounded really young (which is an asset for voice-overs just as it is for on-camera work) and I was a quick learner, so my agent agreed to send me out on voice-over auditions. I had beginner's luck and booked a few commercials right out of the gate. I also booked a few pilot episodes for potential series that never got picked up. Then I hit a dry spell. I got close to booking a few roles, but then, nothing. At this point, I had been auditioning for voice-over roles for four years, and my dream of being the voice of an animated character seemed to be slipping away. Once again, doubt crept in.

I felt like Ariel when she sings the song "Part of Your World." I wanted to be a part of the voice-over world so badly, but no matter how hard I wished for it, it still felt like a far-off dream.

I got a call from my agent saying I had an audition the next day for the new *Star Wars* animated series, and that they wanted me to read for the role of Padmé. I told him that I didn't think I sounded enough like Padmé, but that I would give it a shot.

The next day was exhausting. I had five auditions for five completely different characters at five different casting offices all over the city. As I mentioned before, Los Angeles has a lot of traffic. It can take an hour to drive a couple miles! None of my auditions went particularly well that day, and I didn't even have time to stop for lunch. By the time I got to my *Star Wars* audition, I was tired, I had a headache

because I was hungry, and my patience was running thin. I practiced my lines in my car a couple times, and I still didn't sound anything like Padmé. When I finally walked in, the lobby was packed! There were so many other actresses there, and I recognized several of them because they were some of the top voice actresses in town.

The audition was running over an hour late, and I had my mind made up: I didn't even have a shot at booking this role. I went out to my car and called my agent. I told him that I was considering leaving the audition because there was no way I was going to get this role. I had practiced as much as I could, and I still didn't sound anything like the character.

He calmed me down and told me to stay. I'll never forget what he said: "You should still audition, because you never know what could happen."

He was right. I am always a positive person, and I don't know why I was being so negative. (That's what I get for skipping lunch that day, I guess. I get a little "hangry" when I skip a meal!) For goodness' sake, I was getting the opportunity to audition for a *Star Wars* show, and I've been a *Star Wars* fan ever since I was a little girl! I'd never even dreamed of being an actress for *Star Wars* because I'd thought they were done making movies, and I never thought they would make a TV show. I went back into the lobby and waited until my name was called.

When it was time for my audition, I went into the recording booth, and there were several people on the other side of the glass watching me. (A recording studio is split into two sides by a thick piece of soundproof glass. One side is where the actors stand and perform their lines, and the other side is where the director and sound technicians

sit.) I was so nervous with all the people watching me, but I took a deep breath and said my very first Padmé line. They immediately stopped me, and the casting director said I sounded too young to play Padmé. *Ugh, I was right!* However, what they said next shocked me! They wanted me to read for a new character. She was a fourteen-year-old girl, and they thought I might be perfect for her. I was instantly excited. A new character in *Star Wars*?!

The casting director walked in and gave me the lines. I didn't even have a chance to read them all through before I recorded them for my audition. Then they asked me to read them through again, this time in an Icelandic accent, because the director really wanted this character to sound non-American. My heart sank; I was terrible at doing European accents. I did a few takes and tried so hard to give them what they wanted, but I left feeling like I had blown it. There was no way I was going to get called back for this role. I was heartbroken.

A month later, I got a call from my agent. He told me that I had a callback for the new *Star Wars* show. How could this be?

I thought my audition had been terrible. He said that they really liked the tone of my voice, but they wanted me to practice my Icelandic accent before the callback. I hung up the phone, shocked and so excited! Gosh-darn it, if Icelandic was what they wanted, I was going to give them the best Icelandic accent around. Heck, I would practice so hard, I would convince them that I was *from* Iceland! I found the best dialect coach in town, and we studied for hours. I had never taken something so seriously in my life.

The day of the callback came, and I was ready. I felt that I had perfected the accent, and I couldn't wait to show it off.

Confidently, I went into the recording studio, which was once again filled with several people on the other side of the glass. This time the renowned director Dave Filoni was giving the feedback. Once again, I said my first line, he immediately stopped me, and I couldn't believe what he said next. He wanted me to sound *more* Icelandic. What?!?! I didn't even know how to do that, because I was doing as Icelandic an accent as I could.

I did something that I had never done before. I raised my hand and politely talked back to the director. I said, "I'm sorry, but I *am* doing an Icelandic accent, so I don't know what you want me to do."

Oh, geez; I had really blown it now. I was just so frustrated because I'd given them what they asked for and it still wasn't right. It turns out that he didn't really want a pure Icelandic accent; he wanted a more generic Eastern European-sounding voice. I tried reading the lines a couple different ways and in a few different made-up accents, but they weren't good. Finally, he asked me to read the lines in my own voice. Then they all thanked me for my audition and sent me on my way.

How could this have happened? I'd been so close, and I'd practiced and trained so hard, yet the audition had gone badly. I just hadn't been able to give them what they wanted. I left feeling dejected, but I also had a feeling of comfort knowing that I'd done everything I possibly could to prepare, and I had no regrets. I figured this one just wasn't meant to be. I looked at the whole audition and callback experience as a positive sign that I did have what it takes to be a voice actress; I just needed to keep believing and wait my turn. It was almost Christmas and I was excited to go home and visit family, so I put it out of my mind and moved on.

Remember when Ariel saves Prince Eric from the shipwreck during the storm in *The Little Mermaid*? After Ariel watches Prince Eric's birthday celebration from the side of the ship, a terrible storm with hurricane-force winds comes through, spurring the crew to evacuate.

When Prince Eric's dog, Max, gets stuck on the ship, Eric goes back to save Max and throws him overboard to safety—but Eric's foot gets stuck in a hole on the ship's deck. Before Eric can free himself, a barrel of gunpowder explodes, throwing him unconscious into the sea. Luckily, Ariel is still watching the scene unfold and is able to save Eric from drowning and take him to safety on land. Eric is still unconscious when Ariel begins to sing to him about how badly she wants to be a part of his world. He finally wakes up and gets a glimpse of Ariel before she disappears into the ocean. Then, watching from a rock in the ocean as Eric returns to the castle, Ariel sings:

This is how I felt about the voice-over world. I just had a feeling that one day, I would be a part of it.

KEEP ON *Believing*

A month had passed, and we were now into the new year. Then I got a call from my agent. He said that I'd gotten the part. What part? The *STAR WARS* part! How could this be?! My callback had gone terribly. He said that since this was a new character, they were still trying to figure out what they wanted, but they felt that I embodied the character and brought the right personality and attitude to the role. The best part was that they wanted me to use my real voice—no accent. Since the character was extremely top secret, that's

all they could say. When I showed up at the first recording session, I would find out more.

At the first recording session, I found out that I was going to be the voice of Ahsoka Tano, the Padawan, or apprentice, to Anakin Skywalker. My character was groundbreaking. No one knew that Anakin Skywalker had ever trained a Padawan, not to mention that his Padawan was a fourteen-year-old girl. She would be the first female Jedi with a leading role in the *Star Wars* universe, and I was getting to voice her! As I said before, I thought they were done making *Star Wars* stories, so I'd never even dreamed that I would get to originate a new character. I felt like I had won the lottery!

It hit me that this was a tremendous responsibility and definitely a life-changing experience. The only catch was that we were going to record everything through the end of the first season before any of the new story was released, and I'd have to keep the whole thing a big secret for almost two years....

Here's where the fun begins.

When Luke seeks out Yoda on Dagobah to train with him, Yoda raises an X-wing from the swamp. Luke says, "I don't believe it." Yoda then wisely and definitively says, "That is why you fail."

I keep this Star Wars quote in mind whenever I begin to feel doubt creep in. You will fail if

you don't believe. What is your favorite quote that inspires you to keep believing?

FIND THE FORM OF EDUCATION THAT REALLY *Teaches* **YOU**

Some people learn best when they're sitting in a classroom, and some people, like me, need to learn on the job. Books work for some people, and sometimes we've all just got to learn things the hard way—by making mistakes and vowing never to do *that* again. It's all OK. There's no right or wrong way to learn and no perfect one-size-fits-all place to do it.

The key is finding the form of education that works for you! For me, that meant getting in the car, driving to Los Angeles, and learning by doing. For you, it could mean pursuing an advanced degree or taking one computer coding class. There are so many places to get an education, from internships to summer jobs, lessons to apprenticeships.

Start by making a list—yes, another list—of all the things you wish you knew how to do. Make your list long; make it unrealistic. Then start editing. Do you really need to know how to launch a rocket if your goal is to make a film about alien creatures? If so, take an aerospace class. If not, cross it out and spend more time learning how to do computer graphics so you can make those aliens look really cool.

Once you have your list, start making it realistic to accomplish. It's about breaking it down into smaller, doable

steps. Maybe you can't enroll in a course right now because it doesn't fit into your schedule. That's OK. Find a book or two on the subject and start reading. If you make it achievable, guess what? You can achieve it!



Chapter 3



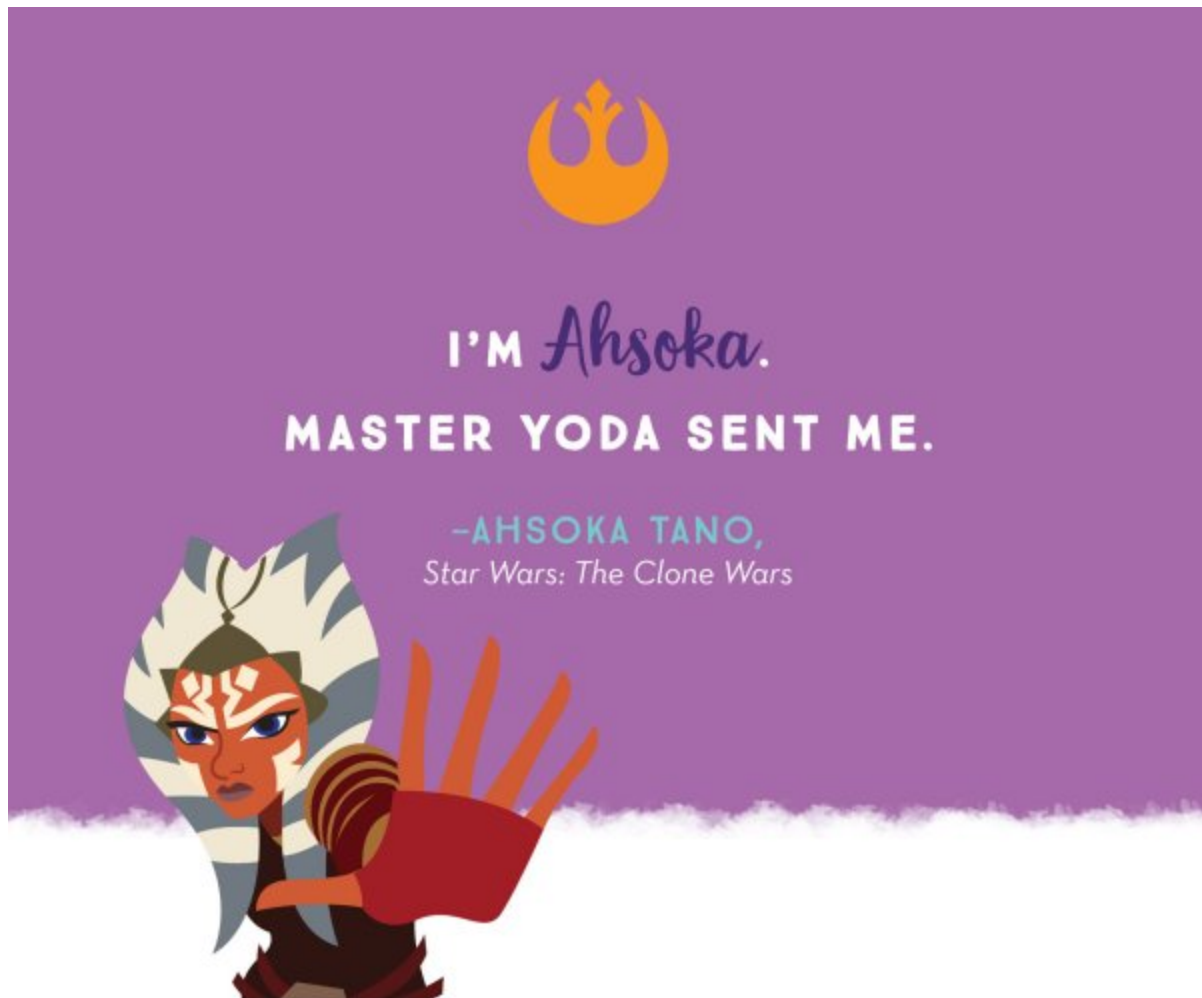
TRY NOT. DO...OR DO NOT. THERE IS NO TRY.

—**YODA**, *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*

This is one of my favorite *Star Wars* quotes. I joke that I have a little Yoda voice in my head that gives me pep talks, and this is one of the things he tells me a lot. After you *wish* and *believe*, the next step in making your dreams come true is to *do*. You can't just sit back, relax, and wait for your dreams to fall in your lap. You have to do something about them and work to make them happen.

On August 15, 2008, *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* debuted. I had no idea how my life was about to change when the film debuted in movie theaters, followed in October by a television series. The world was finally introduced to Ahsoka Tano.

Ahsoka Tano is a Togruta female from the planet Shili. The Togruta are an alien species known for their colorful skin, montrals (horns), and lekku (head-tails). The Jedi Master Plo Koon discovered that Ahsoka was Force-sensitive and brought her to the Jedi Temple to begin her training when she was a youngling. By the time we meet Ahsoka in *The Clone Wars*, she is fourteen, and she's been assigned to Anakin Skywalker as his Padawan by Master Yoda. Anakin is shocked; he thought that Obi-Wan was the one getting a new Padawan, not him. But Master Yoda knew that Anakin and Ahsoka would be a great fit. Ahsoka is highly skilled, but it's her spunky and spontaneous attitude that make her the perfect choice for Anakin, and she quickly gives him the nickname "Skyguy."



Ahsoka's arrival on the scene was met with mixed reactions. She had a big personality and was very snippy. Anakin even nicknamed her "Snips." She talked back to Anakin, and some even called her bratty. Critics didn't quite know what to think, but kids loved her. Finally, girls had another character besides Leia and Padmé to play on the playground—and now there was a lightsaber in their hands.

Say what you want about Ahsoka's personality; she represented change, and her presence alone was groundbreaking.

I'll be honest. I didn't understand how groundbreaking her character was at first. As a lifelong fangirl (the term

often used when referring to female sci-fi, fantasy, and pop culture fans), I was just excited that I was getting to live the *Star Wars* life of my dreams. I was proud to talk about my fandom and be a part of this incredible franchise. I knew this was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. This was before Disney bought *Star Wars*, so most people, like myself, thought that the *Star Wars* series was complete. Fans were surprised to find out that George Lucas had more stories to tell. And the opportunity to originate a new and major character in the *Star Wars* universe was a big deal.

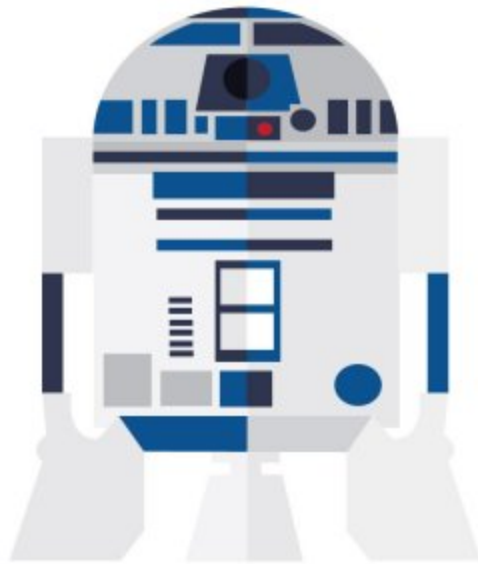
I started getting fan mail from all over the world, welcoming me to the *Star Wars* universe. It soon became obvious that this was more than just a story people liked. Being a *Star Wars* fan was a way of life. I started to hear from all sorts of little girls who loved Ahsoka and loved *Star Wars*. They were so excited to finally have a girl Jedi they could look up to and pretend to be.

I very quickly realized that just by being the voice of Ahsoka, I had become a role model to these girls, and it was an honor that I took very seriously.



IT ALL BEGAN WITH A QUEST FOR A *T-Shirt*

I grew up loving *Star Wars*. As a young girl, I used to pretend to be R2-D2, who's always been my favorite character, in my living room. When Star Tours, the *Star Wars* attraction, opened at Disney World in Hollywood Studios, we loved it—feeling like we were on the forest moon of Endor, riding speeder bikes and playing with Ewoks.



Now that I was the voice of Ahsoka Tano, my life was immersed in the *Star Wars* universe, and I was traveling the nation going to *Star Wars* events and conventions. As I found myself attending more and more events, I wanted to show off my *Star Wars* fandom with my attire. However, despite being a lifelong fan, I only had one *Star Wars* T-shirt in my closet, and it was really small. So I did what lots of girls would do in my situation: I went shopping! I went to the malls and scoured the Internet—and I ended up empty-handed. I had to shop in the men's and boys' section. I knew this wasn't right, because there were women and girls everywhere at all the *Star Wars* events I went to! I clearly wasn't alone.

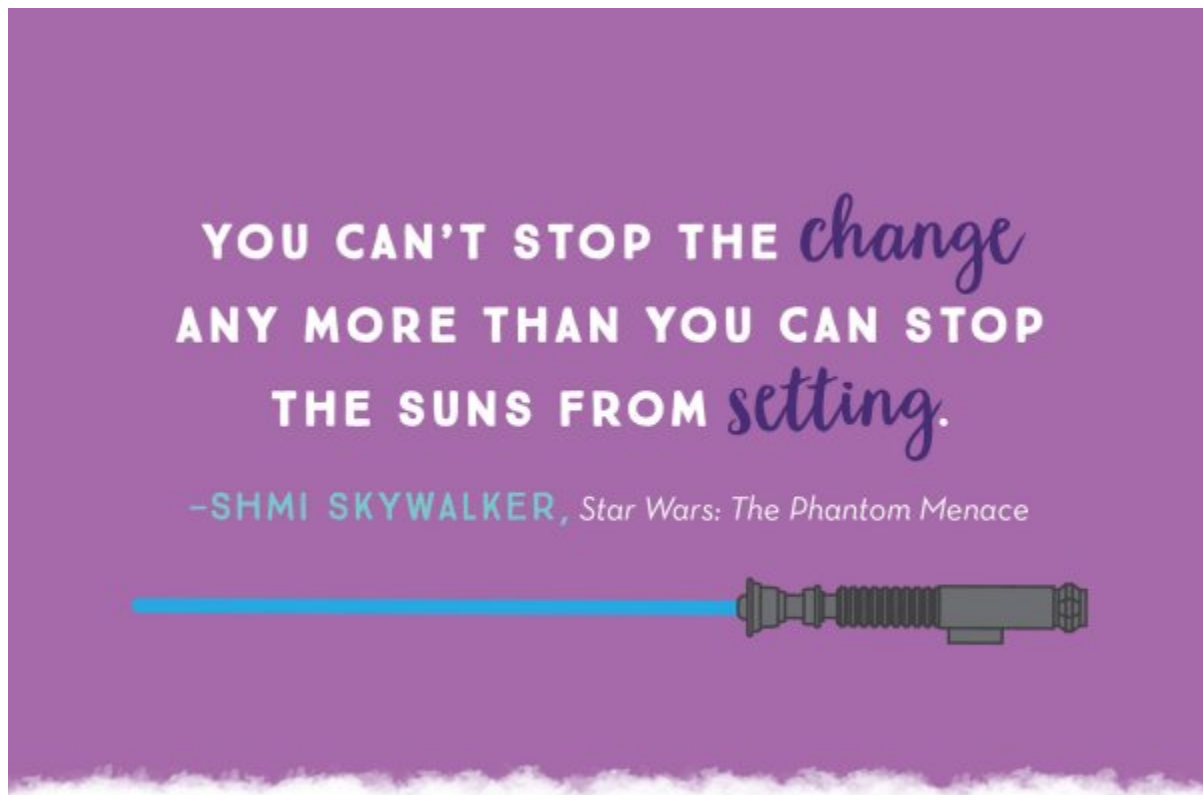
I started to do some research to back up my assumptions, and I gathered information on the attendance of the top five sci-fi and fantasy conventions around the world. I found that, on average, 45 percent of the attendees were women and girls. I also found out that 85 percent of consumer purchases at the time were being made by women. I wasn't a mathematician, but these numbers were not adding up. Why wasn't there more *Star Wars* merchandise for us girls?



As I kept doing my research online, I uncovered an even bigger problem than the lack of merchandise geared toward female *Star Wars* fans: fangirls were being bullied terribly for expressing their love of *Star Wars*.

You see, society had stereotyped that sci-fi and fantasy were for boys, not girls, and therefore almost all the merchandise was made for guys. I read story after story on social media and heard from many of my female fans that when they wore something *Star Wars*, they were made fun of for liking “boy” things. I also talked to many girls who said their parents or friends called them “weird” for liking *Star Wars*, and to adult women who were told to “grow up” and

move on from their fandom. This was when online chat rooms and message boards were very popular, and women and girls were often ignored if they tried to join in on a conversation about *Star Wars*. Sometimes women would pretend to be men in chat rooms just so they could have a conversation about *Star Wars* and be taken seriously.



I was shocked. This was no way to live our lives, and the bullying had to stop! I couldn't believe my findings and thought that someone had to do something about this. Then I thought, *What would Ahsoka do?* She would definitely take action. There was my answer. And since I had my foot in the door at Lucasfilm, I decided to make a call....



Belle

LOOK, THERE SHE GOES
THAT GIRL IS STRANGE,
NO QUESTION
DAZED AND DISTRACTED,
CAN'T YOU TELL
NEVER PART OF ANY CROWD
'CAUSE HER HEAD'S UP
ON SOME CLOUD
NO DENYING SHE'S A FUNNY
GIRL, THAT BELLE

—"Belle," *Beauty and the Beast*



I was ten years old when *Beauty and the Beast* was released, and Belle instantly became an icon for girls who, like me, were different. Belle loved books and education, she yearned for a life beyond her small town, she wanted adventure over settling down with a guy, and she didn't care what everyone else thought of her.



I was like Belle. As the phrase goes, I've always marched to the beat of my own drum, meaning I've always done my own thing. I didn't care what society deemed appropriate for girls, and I pursued my own interests even if it meant being different. Lucky for me, I had two parents who supported me and allowed me to be myself. I loved playing baseball, and for three years, I was the only girl on the team. I loved *Star Wars*, but instead

of wanting to be Princess Leia, I wanted to be R2-D2. For my school pictures, I refused to wear a dress and instead wore my karate uniform. And for Halloween, instead of being a pony or a princess, I was the long-haired Cousin Itt from *The Addams Family*. Oh, yes, people definitely thought I was different and strange.

However, where I felt the most connected with Belle was her love of reading, her ambition, and her yearning for adventure. I was never the smartest girl in class, but I did well in school and strove to make good grades. I studied hard because I wanted to, not because my parents made me. Unfortunately, I was bullied by the other kids for doing well, and they often teased me and called me the teacher's pet. I felt very isolated



from my peers, but having a character like Belle to look up to made me feel empowered. I'd dreamed of being an actress on the Disney Channel from a very young age, but when I was in the third and fourth grades, I also wanted to go to law school and one day become a justice on the United States Supreme Court. I did a book report on Sandra Day O'Connor, the first female US Supreme Court justice, and I was so inspired by her that I was convinced I wanted to be

one, too. I knew that the only way to achieve my goal was to do well in school. I dreamed of one day leaving Orlando and going to California to be on the Disney Channel—and then going to Washington, DC, to be on the Supreme Court. Everyone besides my parents thought I had my head in the clouds, just like Belle, but I was convinced that it was going to happen one day!

Belle definitely paved the way for girls to be “different.” Are you like Belle? Do you feel different from the other people in your town or at your school? Take it from me and from Belle: it’s OK to be different! It’s OK to have interests or goals that are different from those around you. It’s OK to want adventure in the great wide somewhere instead of where you are right now.

Remember, only you can live your life. No one else can live it for you, and you should be happy with what you choose to do and how you spend your time. Is there someone in your life who doesn’t understand you? Or who thinks that your interests or goals are strange or a waste of your time? Try to have a conversation with that person and explain how that kind of criticism makes you feel, and why your interests or choices make you happy. Sometimes, people make negative, doubtful, or hurtful comments because they don’t understand or have all the facts. Also, try to surround yourself with people who share your interests. Seek out clubs, online communities, or organizations where people with similar interests come together.



My first step in inquiring about making merchandise for female *Star Wars* fans was to reach out to my contacts at Lucasfilm. I asked if they could put me in touch with the people who made the merchandise for *Star Wars*. I wanted to ask them why they were not making merchandise for women, and as one of their actresses, I wanted to offer to help design and promote apparel for female fans. I had never made merchandise or designed professionally before, but since I wanted this merchandise for myself, I had a lot of ideas!

The licensing team, which oversees all *Star Wars* merchandise, agreed to meet with me, but the meeting was canceled before it even happened. I worked to get the meeting rescheduled. Then, right before the meeting was supposed to happen the second time, they canceled again. This time they told me no to the meeting *and* no to my idea, because they only gave out licenses to reputable companies that could produce the merchandise for them. After I persisted and requested a meeting for a third time, they had a Lucasfilm representative call me and tell me to give up on my idea. They said I should just settle for a men's size small, because women would not buy merchandise made for them.

I agreed to back off from the way I was going about it, but I did not agree to give up on my idea. I knew that there was a need. I knew that something had to change, and I was more determined than ever to make it happen!

DON'T BE DISCOURAGED BY THE WORD *No*

This was when I learned another very valuable life lesson. I realized that what they were actually saying no to was how

I was going about my idea, not my idea itself. This was a huge lesson in learning how to handle constructive criticism.

Oftentimes when we hear the word *no* or we receive negative feedback, we shut down. We give up and don't allow ourselves to hear the guidance we're being offered.

I'll be the first to tell you that I did not understand the licensing world. Major franchises like *Star Wars* give other companies a license, which is a legal contract for a set amount of time, to make merchandise for them. With that license comes a lot of responsibility. You have to uphold the rules and standards of the company, and you have to pay the company a percentage of your sales.

Once I took a step back and realized what Lucasfilm was trying to tell me when they said no to my meetings, I was actually grateful. I was going about my goal of making merchandise for female fans the wrong way, and I needed to take a step back and start over.

This was when I developed my own process called THE ALPHABET PLAN. When I was growing up, my mom always told me that if plan A fails, go to plan B, and if plan B fails, go to plan C. She encouraged me to have a few different plans for how I could eventually achieve my goal. In my current situation, I had already failed at my plan A, so I was now on to plan B. I was committed, and I knew that I had to make this happen, but I really didn't know how I was going to get there, so I thought I might need the whole alphabet. If I devised a plan for each letter, I'd have twenty-six tries to get it right!



Make your own alphabet plan. On a piece of paper, write down all your different plans in order of priority. It's OK if you don't have a plan for each letter yet—with luck, you'll achieve your goal before you reach plan Z. I was at plan G when I achieved mine.



An important lesson you have to learn in order to make the alphabet plan successful is this one:

IT'S OK TO *fail*.

This is one of the most important lessons I hope you take away from this book. It's OK to fail. In fact, if you don't fail at some point, you're not trying hard enough. Everyone fails. The alphabet plan does not work if you don't fail. To achieve your dreams, you must take risks, take chances. Not all those chances are going to work out. Sometimes you'll just make a misstep, and sometimes you'll fail so badly that you go down in flames. I'm grateful for my failures because those were the times where I really learned, where I really improved, where I really made progress.

I didn't get to plan G of my alphabet plan without failing. Embrace and admit your failures. Don't make excuses.



THE VERY THINGS THAT HELD
YOU DOWN ARE GONNA CARRY
YOU *up* AND *up* AND *up*!

-TIMOTHY Q. MOUSE, *Dumbo*



It's OK to say, "You know what? I tried, and I thought that would work, but it didn't. This plan failed." However, there is a treasure trove of knowledge to be learned from each failure. Make sure you study and analyze why it didn't work out. We live in a society that applauds perfection and devalues failure. But failure is essential for growth. A true test of bravery and maturity is the ability to stare failure in the face, learn from it, and succeed as a result.

Speaking of bravery, an excellent example of learning from and dealing with your failure is Merida from the movie *Brave*. Merida makes a huge mistake by asking a witch for a spell to change her mother, which in turn will change her own fate—or so she thinks. The Witch gives Merida a cake to feed her mother and promises that it will change Merida's fate. After Merida's mother, Queen Elinor, eats a bite of the cake, she turns into a bear, leaving Merida to realize that her plan was a huge failure. When they try to find the Witch to reverse the spell, Merida and her mother are met with this message: "Fate be changed, look inside, mend the bond torn by pride." Queen Elinor will remain a bear unless they break the spell by the second sunrise. Facing her failure, Merida and her mother go on a journey to break the spell. Merida thinks she has it figured out when she tries to literally mend the family tapestry that she tore out of pride. When that doesn't work, even as the sun is rising on the second day, Merida's grief makes it clear that her heart has changed, and the bond between Merida and her mother torn by pride is now mended with love and understanding. Queen Elinor turns back into a human, and Merida has learned from her failure.

On a piece of paper, write down at least one of your failures. What did you learn from that

experience that you can do differently next time?



FIND YOUR *Team*

Next I had to build my team. Early on, I was given some very wise advice: “Surround yourself with people who are smarter than you.” That does *not* mean that you are not smart. It means that a great team is composed of a variety of people with different strengths.

It’s important to know your strengths, but it’s also important to know your weaknesses so you can find help in those areas.

In my case, I needed to find a great lawyer who understood how to start a business, a great businessperson who could help me with the financial side, and a great licensing person who understood that world and could help me find a manufacturing partner. It doesn’t really matter what you are trying to achieve, but having that inner circle of people you trust is so important. Whether each member is an active part of making your dream happen, like a coach or teacher, or just someone you can talk to and count on for support, it helps to identify your team early on.

Who would you consider to be your team members or your inner circle? I assembled a

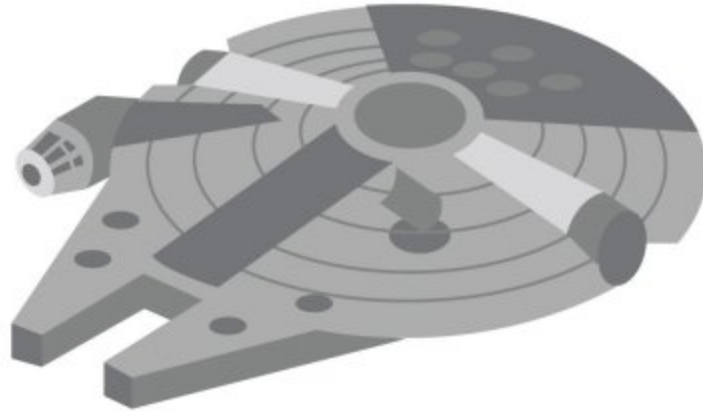
team to help me start my business, but we all need teams or support systems for anything we choose to do. If you are in school, your team could be your adviser, professor, study group, and parents. If you are an athlete, it could be your coach, trainer, physical therapist, and teammates.

In order to make my dream happen, I had to officially start my own company, and I founded Her Universe in 2010. Then I had to find a manufacturing partner who could handle a license for *Star Wars*. Both of these milestones took about six months and a lot of learning. If you start your own business, make sure you find a lawyer you trust who can help you set everything up correctly and make sure your rights are protected.

***Never* GIVE UP**

Now, I had to convince Lucasfilm to give me another meeting. They had already told me no twice, but this time was different. I had started my own company, I had a manufacturing partner, and I was ready to apply for a license. While visiting Lucasfilm for a promotion for *The Clone Wars*, I went to see my friend, Lynne Hale. Lynne has worked at Lucasfilm for over three decades and I am so lucky to work alongside her on all of my Star Wars projects. I confessed to Lynne what I had been up to and told her I was ready for a meeting with the Lucasfilm licensing team. As luck would have it, Howard Roffman, the head of Lucasfilm licensing, just happened to walk right past Lynne's office at

that moment. Lynne told me to hold on and then ran down the hallway. She'd been gone for about ten minutes when her assistant came in and asked me to walk down to Howard's office. When I arrived, both Lynne and Howard were sitting there.



Lynne told me that she'd filled Howard in on what I had been doing and that I had ten minutes to pitch my idea right then and there. Holy cow! Talk about being put on the spot!

There was no time to prepare. Everything that I had been working on for the past six months had led up to this moment, and I had to hope and trust that I would say everything right and convince him that I was ready. I was so nervous, but I had been working so hard and doing so much research that the words just flew out of my mouth. I proved to them that I had done everything the right way. I told them about my business; I told them that I was prepared for manufacturing; I told them that I understood licensing; and most importantly, I insisted that *Star Wars* is for everyone, and that includes female fans, too. I was confident and passionate, and I've found that when you have confidence with passion, it's a powerful combination. Honestly, I'd call it a superpower.

It worked! Howard said that he would have his team contact me to set up a meeting.

As we walked out of Howard's office, Lynne gave me a big hug and said that I'd done a great job. I was stunned and couldn't believe what had just happened. It just goes to show that you never know when you'll get your chance, and that you have to be ready when opportunity knocks. To this day, I thank Lynne Hale and call her one of my guardian angels for making that moment happen.

A few weeks later, I was back at Lucasfilm for my official pitch. Paul Southern, another executive in charge of Lucasfilm licensing, was in the meeting. He agreed to give us a license to make merchandise for female fans, and he was extremely supportive. He warned me, however, that they had not been successful in making merchandise for women in the past, and he wanted to know how my attempt was going to be different. I told him that I was going to use the platform they were already giving me as an actress to promote the clothes, and that I would go directly to the fans and let them know Her Universe finally existed for them.



He cautioned me that if we went directly to the retail stores and failed, we would not get a second chance, so we ended up with rights to sell only on our own website and at conventions. While this license felt incredibly restrictive, it was the best thing they ever could have done for us. It forced us to go directly to the fans to build Her Universe from the ground up. Also, I got to feel a bit like Han Solo when they shared that the odds were not in my favor and I said, “Never tell me the odds.”

We launched Her Universe on June 22, 2010, with our website WWW.HERUNIVERSE.COM. Her Universe was a merchandise line, but more importantly, it was also a community where I asked female fans to step into the spotlight and be celebrated. For so long fangirls had been

ignored, and they were going to be ignored no more! We started with a small collection of T-shirts made for women, and we pounded the pavement, going to conventions and events all over the United States asking for support. We also used social media to build an online community and get our message out.



My hope was that if I made merchandise for female fans, they would feel more comfortable showing off their fandom and being themselves. We had a major stereotype to debunk, and we had to do it together. I said, “United we stand, divided we fall.” Together we would prove that change was possible and that stories like *Star Wars*, these stories we love so much, are for everyone! Now my dream was that one day we’d be able to walk into a store and there would be the same amount of *Star Wars* merchandise for girls as there was for boys—and that the bullying of fangirls would stop. We were on our way, and my journey with Her Universe had just begun.



While it's important to build your team, I want to clarify that *you* have to be the driving force of your own destiny. *You* have to *do* the work. One very important thing about

making your dreams come true is that it starts with you. You cannot rely on someone else to make your dreams happen for you. I had help and guidance from several incredible people, but at the end of the day, I had to make it happen for myself. I had to learn every job, study every aspect, pay attention to every detail, and maintain a laser focus on my end goal. Every single time I tried to cut corners or did not give something 100 percent, I did not get 100 percent back. You get what you put in. So, accept the help, but make sure *you* do the work.

DO SOMETHING EVERY DAY TO GET CLOSER TO YOUR *Goal*

It's important to keep moving forward, even on days when you're not exactly sure where the path leads. Making an effort to do something every day ensures that you're keeping your head in the game, staying focused on your goal, and doing something—even something small—to make that happen.

IN EVERY JOB THAT
MUST BE DONE
THERE IS AN
ELEMENT OF FUN
YOU FIND THE FUN,
AND SNAP
THE JOB'S A GAME

—"A Spoonful of Sugar,"

Mary Poppins

I love the movie *Mary Poppins*, especially the scene where Mary teaches Jane and Michael how to turn the boring task of cleaning their nursery into a game. So I turned unlocking my achievements into a game, too.

I have always set internal benchmarks for myself for various achievements, big and small. At any given time, I have a list of goals I am hoping to accomplish: some are short-term and some are long-term. I like to establish a reward system for myself with respect

to those goals. For instance, if I had my eye on a cute *Alice in Wonderland* purse, instead of just buying it, I would tell myself that I wouldn't get that purse until I had accomplished something on my list. It presented an extra challenge, and it made the reward feel a lot more exciting—like I'd actually won a prize!

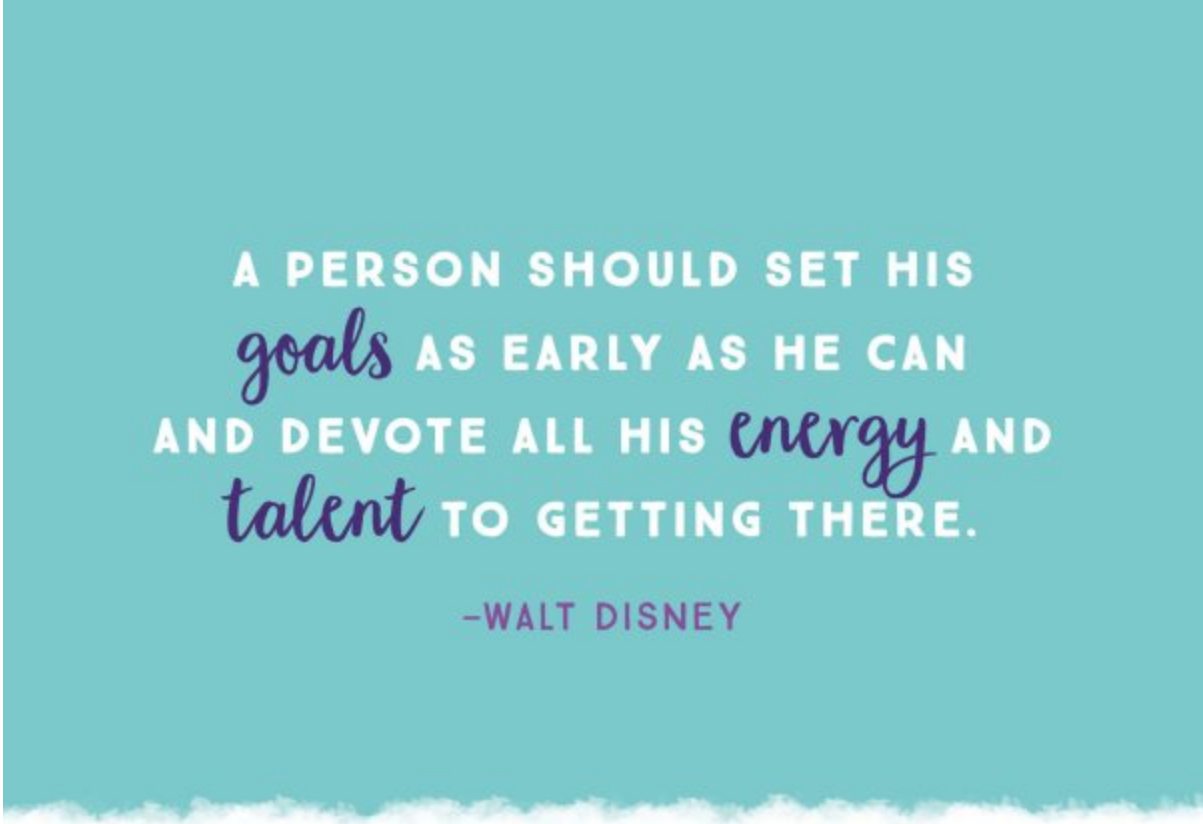
Try it! The challenge can be big or small, and so can the reward. This is just a motivating game, but I find that it really works.



So, if your goal is to win a starting spot on the varsity volleyball team, you'll need to identify small daily steps you can take that will help you get there. That may mean working on your serve two hundred times in a row. It may mean recruiting a friend to rally with on a day when it seems like more fun to stay inside and watch a movie. Think of it this way: what if someone else who is vying for that same spot on the team is rallying or practicing serves while you're sitting inside?

You should find one small thing you can do each day that helps you reach your goal; and don't worry that it's too small to be significant. Anything, even just sitting and thinking about your strategy, is helpful. Sometimes the best thing you can do is write down a list of things you need to get done. Sometimes you need to spend time thinking instead of doing. But that counts. It gets you closer to your goal.

Your goal could be in music, sports, entrepreneurship, or school. It's your personal commitment to making something happen, something that's important to you. Commit to finding something meaningful that you can accomplish each day, and you'll find that you reach your goal much more quickly.



A PERSON SHOULD SET HIS
goals AS EARLY AS HE CAN
AND DEVOTE ALL HIS *energy* AND
talent TO GETTING THERE.

-WALT DISNEY

Now is your time to turn your dreams into an action plan. You can do it! If you look at the steps you are taking in getting an education and finding achievable things to do each and every day, you'll realize you're *already* doing it.

Oftentimes we feel like there has to be one big day when everything begins, like the day we get in the car to drive to Los Angeles; but really there is a long chain of events that goes into a journey. In order to *do* it, you have to experience all the events along the way. It's like the expression about being so focused on the destination that we forget the journey. Don't miss the journey. It will make the process of getting to the destination so much more enjoyable. And know that whether you've taken one step or ten steps, you are on your way. You are *doing* it!

OPERATION: DREAMS-COME-TRUE ACTION PLAN

On a piece of paper, write down your action plan. Start with a week. Write down one thing you are going to do each day. Remember, it helps to break things down into smaller steps. If you try to tackle too much at one time, it can seem overwhelming.





Chapter 4



TRANSFORM

**THE FLOWER THAT BLOOMS IN ADVERSITY IS THE MOST RARE AND
BEAUTIFUL OF ALL.**

—THE EMPEROR, *Mulan*

Looking back now, starting Her Universe was the easy part. Transforming Her Universe from an idea to a flourishing community and business was one of the hardest things I've ever done in my life. I've diagnosed myself with what I call chronic naïveté. By that, I mean when I see a need for something, I just dive in headfirst and say, "Why not?" Then I ask questions later and figure out how to make it happen. I don't see the twists and turns on the road to get there, I just see the final result and the end goal. Due to my positive attitude, I've been called naïve a lot. I don't take offense to it. In fact, I look at it as an advantage.

If I had a soul sister, it would be Rapunzel. You have probably heard the phrase "looking at the world through rose-colored glasses"? That means viewing scenarios and opportunities with an overly positive or optimistic approach. I'm going to update this phrase to "looking at the world through Rapunzel-colored glasses."



Rapunzel definitely suffers from chronic naïveté, and that's her secret to always having the *best day ever*! Rapunzel sees the good in every person and every situation. When she finally leaves her tower with Flynn Rider, her fears and doubts are utterly outshone by the strength of her hope and excitement about finally getting an up-close look at the floating lights she's been watching from afar all her life.

Characters throughout the film let her down and try to darken her spirit. However, Rapunzel's relentless positivity is what carries her through adversity and leads to her dream of seeing the lights—and then to her new dream of falling in love with Flynn Rider (aka Eugene Fitzherbert) and reuniting with her parents as the long-lost princess.



YOU'RE TOO NAÏVE TO BE HERE.

—Mother Gothel, *Tangled*

Rapunzel's "mother" tries to keep Rapunzel locked away in her tower and afraid of the outside world. She does everything she can to convince Rapunzel that the world is a dangerous and scary place. Rapunzel's mother represents all the things in life that want to drag us down.

I believe we are all born with the spirit of Rapunzel, but as

we grow up, various people and experiences will try to taint our positive view on life and cast doubt over our dreams and ambitions. However, only you have the power to turn off your light; no one else does. I challenge you to start each day by putting on your Rapunzel-colored glasses, because every day has the potential to be the *best day ever!*



Thank goodness for my chronic naïveté, because I had no idea what was ahead. I didn't realize how hard it would be to change the mind-set of our general society, which very much wanted to separate things into a blue aisle for boys and a pink aisle for girls. And I didn't realize how hard it would be to do what was right *and* what was profitable. I just knew that girls were in need, and I wanted to be the one to help.

USE THE *Resources* YOU HAVE

Now it was time to get to work! I definitely felt like a small fish in a big pond. I looked at other merchandise companies and couldn't even comprehend how I was going to compete. I quickly realized that I shouldn't even try. In order to be successful, I had to do things *my* way.

A company like Her Universe had never been attempted before, and there was no road map or guide since I was venturing into uncharted territory. In the sci-fi and fantasy world, there had never been a company that only focused on female fans. Many people told me that it could not be done and that the only way for me to make money and have a profitable business was to sell to men and boys, too.

I knew that if I were going to succeed in this revolutionary endeavor, I'd have to make my own rule book. So, from the beginning, I kept my head down and did my best not to pay attention to what the other companies were doing. Luckily, I had a secret weapon: the fans.

Once I asked fangirls what they wanted, the floodgates opened. And I listened.

Finally, fangirls felt like they were being given a voice. In the first six months of Her Universe, I went to five conventions across the nation and stood at our “boutique” all day every day, passing out information about the company and talking to fans. I asked fans what they wanted and what they didn’t want. I asked for their feedback and criticism. When I wasn’t at a convention, I was on social media, spreading the word and building our community.



THIS IS ONE OF OUR FIRST
FANS, ERIN.

You can use my experience to develop your own secret weapon.

Make sure to listen. Listen to those around you. Seek out advice from people who have a fresh perspective. Sometimes you won’t know what you’re doing wrong or right, and it takes a fresh set of eyes to see what you can’t. Learning and growing from that feedback is key in transforming.

Time to listen! Below are three questions about yourself to ask someone who knows you. Really listen to the responses. You may or may not agree, and that's OK, but chances are you will learn something valuable about yourself or your journey through this conversation.

WHAT ARE SOME THINGS I DO REALLY *well*?

WHAT ARE AREAS I CAN *improve* UPON?

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR ME AS I PURSUE MY *dreams*?



BE PREPARED TO WORK HARD

MAMA, I DON'T HAVE TIME FOR DANCING!
THAT'S JUST GONNA HAVE TO WAIT A WHILE
AIN'T GOT TIME FOR MESSIN' AROUND
AND IT'S NOT MY STYLE



THIS OLD TOWN CAN SLOW YOU DOWN
PEOPLE TAKING THE EASY WAY
BUT I KNOW EXACTLY WHERE I'M GOING
I'M GETTIN' CLOSER AND CLOSER EVERY DAY

AND I'M ALMOST THERE. I'M ALMOST THERE
PEOPLE DOWN HERE THINK I'M CRAZY, BUT I DON'T CARE
TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS, I'VE HAD MY SHARE
THERE AIN'T NOTHING GONNA STOP ME NOW
'CAUSE I'M ALMOST THERE

-“ALMOST THERE,” THE PRINCESS AND THE FROG



This is the song Tiana sings to her mom when she's finally able to put a down payment on the building for her dream restaurant, Tiana's Place. Tiana works hard for everything she has, and nothing was ever just handed to her. In the film *The Princess and the Frog*, we watch as Tiana relentlessly pursues her dream and works tirelessly to save up money to open her restaurant. She works two jobs and turns down opportunities to hang out with her friends in order to pick up extra shifts.

My life was now like Tiana's: it was consumed with work. I quickly realized that owning and building your own business is a 24/7 job.

From the moment I woke up until the time I went to bed, I was thinking about Her Universe. The work was constant. Luckily, I love what I do, and when you love what you do, it doesn't feel like work. However, you can quickly burn out, too. I was on the verge of overworking myself and losing some of my joy. One night, I was having dinner with my friend and mentor, Lynne Hale. I told her running Her Universe was exciting, but it was more work than I'd ever imagined. Lynne could tell that I was feeling a little weary, so she asked me, "Why? What's your *why*?" She had read a book by author Simon Sinek called *Start with Why*, and she told me it's important to identify why you are doing what you are doing. Having a reason turns your work into a mission.

If you don't have a *why*, what are you fighting for? What are you working tirelessly for? My *why* was the fangirl community. My *why* was a different girl I met each and every day as we built our community.

During the first few months of starting Her Universe, there was a story that went viral about a little girl named Katie who was bullied for carrying a *Star Wars* water bottle to school. Katie loved *Star Wars*, but her mom, Carrie, noticed that she had stopped carrying her beloved *Star Wars* water bottle to school. When Carrie asked about it, Katie burst into tears and explained that the boys in her class had made fun of her for liking *Star Wars*, because *Star Wars* was for boys.



People all over the world opened up their hearts and wrapped their arms around Katie with a big, protective hug. The passionate response wasn't just about Katie. It represented a community of people who wanted bullying like this to stop. Women and girls all over the world who had been bullied or picked on like Katie had spoken up and showed her that she was not alone: that other girls, millions of girls around the world, liked *Star Wars*, too.

This was my *why*. This was why Her Universe needed to exist and why I needed to transform and grow this company: so stories like this would become a thing of the past.



After Katie's story went viral, I felt that I had to do something more. This story felt personal because it was about one of our own, a fangirl. Being bullied makes people feel isolated. I know because when I was in fifth grade, I was bullied terribly. As I mentioned earlier, I did well in school, and some of the other girls in my class teased me and called me the "teacher's pet." They made my year miserable. They called me all sorts of names, taunted me, and stuck their tongues out at me when the teacher wasn't looking. I didn't have any friends, and it was a very lonely year. It did not get better until I went to middle school and met a new group of friends who understood me and accepted me for who I was. I'm grateful that my story got better, but I know that some kids are not so lucky. So I wanted to be there for girls who felt alone. The problem was, I could not go to their schools.

I needed to figure out a way that fangirls could feel accepted and understood and know there was a place they belonged. So I came up with Fangirl of the Day. We started a column on our blog and social media where, every single day, we featured a new fangirl. This way, if a girl felt alone and like she were the only one at her school or in her town

who liked these so-called “boys’ properties,” she could come home and meet another girl who was just like her.

WHAT IS YOUR *Why*?

Tiana works hard to open her own restaurant to honor the dream she shared with her dad when she was a little girl. Tiana bonded with her dad over cooking, and he wanted to open a restaurant to bring people together from all walks of life and put smiles on their faces. This is Tiana’s *why*.

What is your *why*? It is very important to identify your *why*, because when you work really hard and it feels like your internal gas tank is running on empty, your *why* will keep you going.

EXPECT CHALLENGES, ACCEPT *Challenges*

Her Universe was not even a year old when I ran into my first major obstacle and learned another major lesson. At the end of the day, Her Universe was a business, and in order for a business to keep running, it has to make money.

For the first year, our sales were not bad, considering that we were allowed to sell our merchandise only at conventions and on our website. However, we quickly learned that in order to be profitable, we’d have to branch out and start selling to other retailers. The problem was, we didn’t have the licensing rights to do that.

I’ll never forget when I received a call from my manufacturing partners telling me they wanted to give up on Her Universe. They said that without the ability to sell our product at retail stores, there was no way this was going to

be a profitable business, so they basically wanted to back out.

How could this be happening? We had made so much progress and come so far in just a year. We couldn't quit now!

However, without a manufacturing partner, I couldn't maintain the Lucasfilm license or make the merchandise. I told my partners the business *could* be profitable, but that I needed more time. I told them I would find a way to get permission from Lucasfilm and get our product to retail stores. Did I know how I was going to do that? No, but I was going to find a way.

Here I was at a crossroads: Lucasfilm had told me no one had ever been successful in selling *Star Wars* products to girls, and now my partners were telling me they wanted to back out because there wasn't enough money in the business. I felt so alone in my quest. I had to believe in myself and believe in the business when it felt like no one else did.

I had to figure out how to transform my situation when my back was up against the wall and I found everyone else's lack of faith disturbing. I had to put Her Universe on my shoulders and figure out how to prove people wrong.

STOP, TAKE STOCK, AND *Breathe*

I went back to my roots and started with Disney Parks. Remember how I told you that Hollywood Studios was my park and my place of firsts? Well, not only had Disney taught me to transform any situation, Disney directly helped me transform my situation.

Honestly, it was surreal. Now that I was the voice of Ahsoka Tano, Disney asked me to be a celebrity guest and host for *Star Wars* Weekends, a monthlong event at Hollywood Studios. I would spend my entire weekends signing autographs, hosting shows, and being in parades.



Yes, you heard that right: parades!

At the same park where I had danced as a cheerleader down Hollywood Boulevard in the Hercules parade, I was now sitting in the back of a car waving to fans as a celebrity guest. Disney had made my dreams of being an actress come true, and they were about to make my dreams as a designer and business owner come true.



IF YOU *strike* ME DOWN, I SHALL
BECOME MORE *powerful* THAN
YOU CAN POSSIBLY IMAGINE.

—OBI-WAN KENOBI, *Star Wars: A New Hope*

Until Her Universe came along, Disney really hadn't offered any *Star Wars* merchandise for women and girls. An entire family might come to the event together, but when it came to buying merchandise, the female fans would often walk away empty-handed. Lucasfilm introduced me to the buyers for the event, and they were kind enough to take a meeting with me. They said that the limited amount of merchandise they had done in the past for female fans had not sold well, so they wouldn't be able to sell our merchandise in the park year-round. However, they would give Her Universe an opportunity and sell our T-shirts in the parks during *Star Wars* Weekends. If it sold well, they would consider bringing it into the parks year-round.



THESE WERE THE FIRST SHIRTS WE SOLD AT
DISNEY'S HOLLYWOOD STUDIOS.

I was thrilled. They were giving me a chance, and that was all I needed!

On the first day of the event, they let me into the shop early, and I got to be the very first customer in line. I couldn't believe it. I actually started crying. Hollywood Studios, my park, was selling my merchandise in retail for the very first time. Disney Parks was the first retailer to give me a chance. They allowed us to bring five different T-shirts to *Star Wars* Weekends: three for women and two for girls. We made what we thought was enough to last us for four weekends.

To everyone's shock, we sold out of everything on the first weekend!

We had to rush print and ship more shirts, and by the end of the four weekends, we'd sold out of every single shirt. We had done it! We were proving that women and girls would buy merchandise made for them. And since our shirts had sold so well, the Disney buyers decided to sell our merchandise year-round in Disney World and Disneyland!

Thanks to the success at Disney Parks, Lucasfilm agreed to give us the license and the rights to sell our merchandise to other retailers. I had my sights set on one in particular: Hot Topic.

ALWAYS MAKE NEW *Wishes*

Hot Topic was the destination for all things pop culture. I was a regular shopper at Hot Topic; aside from Disney itself, that's where I got all my cool *Alice in Wonderland* merchandise. I remember reading an article about how cool Hot Topic was to work for and work with, and I made a wish on that article right then and there.

I wished that one day, I would walk into a Hot Topic and there would be the same amount of merchandise geared toward fangirls as there was toward fanboys—and that most of the fangirl merchandise would be from Her Universe.

Thanks to some mutual connections, we were able to get a meeting with Hot Topic and pitch them the Her Universe brand, showing them some of our upcoming *Star Wars* designs. It was almost May 4, which is informally but internationally known as *Star Wars* Day (“May the fourth be with you”—get it?). They agreed to test some of our merchandise as a special collection for May 4.

This was it. This was our defining moment; the moment we had been working toward for almost two years, the moment I had begged my partners to wait for. Just as Lucasfilm warned, if you go to retail and fail, you don't get a second chance. The fate of Her Universe was riding on this collection selling well. Thankfully, we had spent two years building our own army of fangirls: our loyal community that wanted change. I put out a call to our fans, a battle cry of

sorts, asking them to support us with their dollars because the only way to change the perception was through sales.



The collection went on sale in the morning, and I'm happy to share that by midafternoon most of it was already sold out. We blew away their expectations, and it was a *huge* win for our fangirl community!

Hot Topic immediately reordered several of the designs and wanted to work on a new collection together. We had made it to retail, and Her Universe was able to survive.

THE *Power* OF PRINCESSES

The Disney Princesses played a huge part in shaping the person I am today, especially when it comes to the subject of transforming. The first princess I was introduced to was Cinderella. The iconic scene where Cinderella's rags transform into her ball gown will forever be cemented in my mind as one of the most magical scenes in all the Disney movies.

THIS WAS THE VERY FIRST
DRESS I EVER DESIGNED
WITH MY MOM INSPIRED BY
THE DISNEY PRINCESSES.
IT'S A MASH-UP OF
CINDERELLA AND AURORA.



As a little girl, I watched that scene and believed that transforming was magic, that it was something caused by an external force. However, when I got a little older, I realized that the power to transform her situation actually came from Cinderella herself and her unwavering power to keep dreaming.



EVERY ONCE IN A WHILE,
THERE'S A DAY WHEN I DON'T
HAVE TO BE A princess.
NO lessons, NO expectations.
A DAY WHERE ANYTHING CAN
happen. A DAY I CAN
CHANGE MY fate.

-MERIDA, *Brave*

I met Cinderella, Aurora, and Snow White at an early age, but I was also fortunate to grow up during a time when Disney released a new princess movie every few years. From the time I was seven until I was sixteen years old, I got to meet Ariel, Belle, Jasmine, Pocahontas, and Mulan. I watched and learned from each princess as she went on her own journey of discovery and transformation. I learned that the power to transform comes from within and that we all have the power to transform any situation as long as we dream, believe, and do.

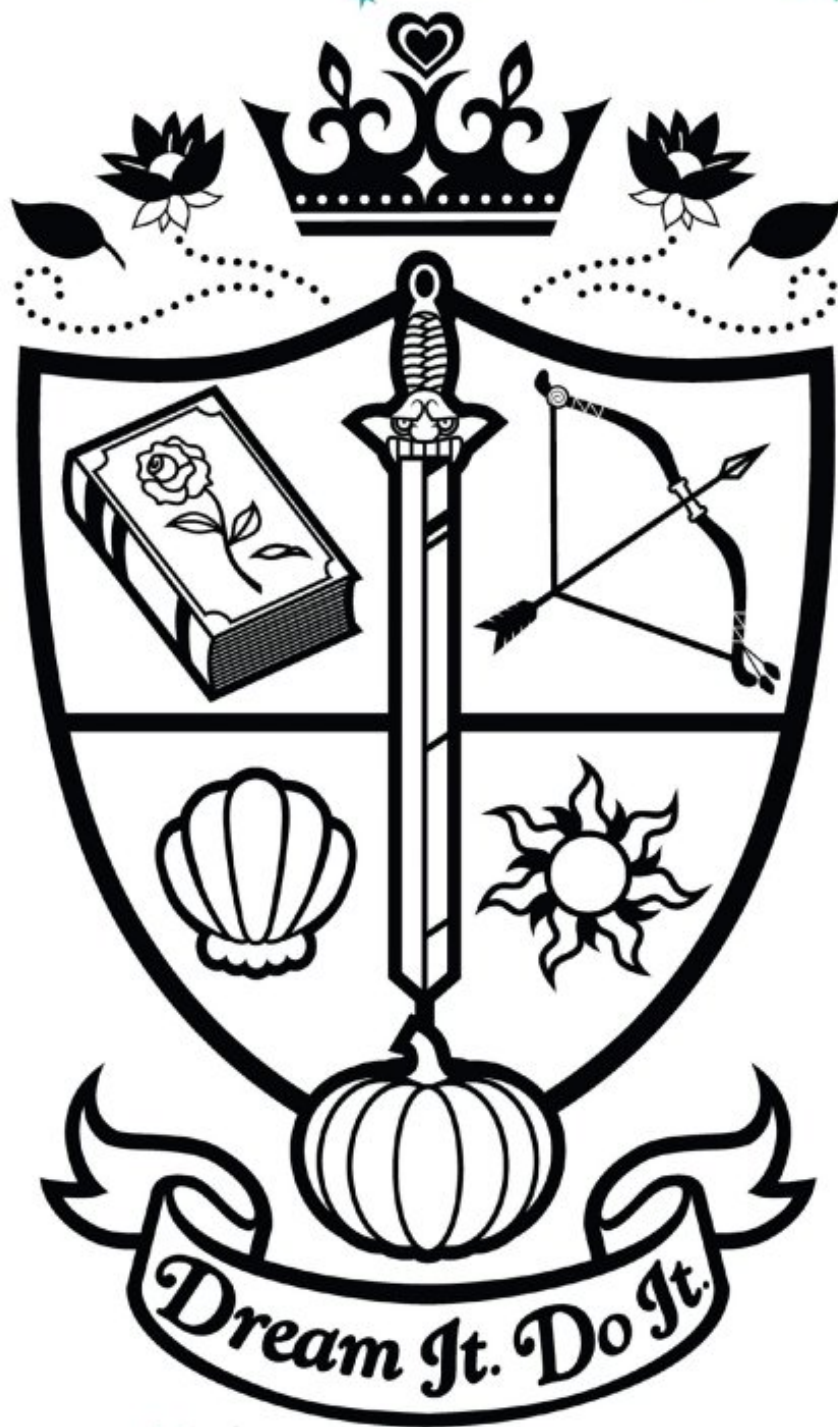
When I look at the princesses, I don't see women who are waiting to be saved by a prince. I see strong, powerful warriors who helped shape the woman I am today. Her Universe has opened up so many doors for me, and one of the most exciting opportunities in my entire life came when Disney asked me to design a Disney Princess line for young girls. They wanted me to bring my own perspective on the Disney Princesses and what these iconic characters mean to me.

When I start with a new design, it helps to find the meaning or the emotional connection behind it. I often like to hide inspirational quotes or messages in my designs because what you wear should also empower your attitude. The Disney Princesses have played a huge part in the lessons I've mentioned throughout this book, and the idea of *dreaming it* and *doing it* can be found somewhere in the journey of each princess. Every princess starts her story with a dream, and she goes on a journey to make that dream happen.

I also realized that, as a Disney Princess fan myself, I don't always want to wear a princess on my clothes. When I

put on a princess-inspired design, I want to feel like I *am* the princess.

I love symbols. I think symbols are an effective shortcut to represent traits, meanings, or descriptions. So I decided to design a crest representing what the princesses had taught me. I see the crest almost as a representation of attending a Disney Princess school where these lessons and traits would be taught. This crest is placed on multiple designs and serves as a symbol of being a true Disney Princess.



Starting at the top:



THE *crown*: This represents that we are all Disney Princesses. The power of the princess is inside us!



THE *water lily*: This element is inspired by Tiana and is a reminder to always work hard. Tiana famously says,

“THE ONLY WAY TO GET
WHAT YOU WANT IN THIS WORLD IS
THROUGH HARD WORK.”



THE *leaves AND swirls*: This is inspired by Pocahontas and is a reminder to go wherever the wind takes you. Sometimes the path you’re going down may change you, and you’ll have to listen to your heart and be open to following a new path. My favorite quote from *Pocahontas* is

“SOMETIMES THE RIGHT PATH
IS NOT THE EASIEST ONE.”



THE BOOK: This is inspired by Belle and is a reminder to keep learning and choose your own adventure. Education is so important. Whether it's in school or in life, we must always keep learning and pushing the boundaries. Belle never settles and always wants more. She sings,

"I WANT ADVENTURE IN THE
GREAT WIDE SOMEWHERE
I WANT IT MORE THAN I CAN TELL
AND FOR ONCE IT MIGHT BE GRAND TO
HAVE SOMEONE UNDERSTAND
I WANT SO MUCH MORE THAN
THEY'VE GOT PLANNED"



THE SWORD: This is inspired by Mulan. Every girl has an inner warrior. The sword is a reminder to always strive to reflect your true self. Mulan's song, "Reflection," is one of my favorites, because we all struggle with how we are perceived by others and by ourselves. Are we authentically ourselves?

Or are we trying too hard to be what other people want us to be?

“WHEN WILL MY REFLECTION SHOW
WHO I AM INSIDE?”



THE BOW AND ARROW: This is inspired by Merida and is a reminder to always be brave and fight for your own destiny. Following your dreams is not always easy and can often be scary. Merida teaches us,

“OUR FATE LIVES WITHIN US. YOU ONLY
HAVE TO BE BRAVE ENOUGH TO SEE IT.”



THE SHELL: This is inspired by Ariel and is a reminder to always find your voice. Especially when we're young, adults often speak for us. Finding your voice and learning to speak for yourself can be terrifying and liberating all at the same time. Ariel was the first princess we saw who truly rebelled against the plans her father and those around her had for her.

BRIGHT YOUNG WOMEN
SICK OF SWIMMING
READY TO STAND

–“PART OF YOUR WORLD,” LITTLE MERMAID



THE SUN: This is inspired by Rapunzel and is a reminder to always see the light and stay positive. Rapunzel is an eternal optimist who chooses to see the light even when it's shrouded by fog.

“AND AT LAST I SEE THE LIGHT
AND IT'S LIKE THE FOG HAS LIFTED
AND AT LAST I SEE THE LIGHT
AND IT'S LIKE THE SKY IS NEW”



THE PUMPKIN: This is probably one of the most recognizable elements and is inspired by Cinderella. The pumpkin represents transformation. We have the ability to transform any situation. Every princess has this power.

**“IF YOU KEEP ON BELIEVING,
THE DREAMS THAT YOU WISH
WILL COME TRUE.”**

Finally, I wrote a mantra, a personal monologue that every girl can say to empower herself to take on each day. This will be on the hangtag of every princess design:

I AM brave.

I AM fearless.

I AM kind.

I AM courageous.

I WILL work hard.

I WILL always see the light

AND FILL THE WORLD WITH sunshine.

MY VOICE IS MY own.

MY REFLECTION IS MY warrior.

I WILL FOLLOW MY OWN path

AND CHOOSE MY OWN adventure.

I AM A shooting star.

I WILL wish, I WILL believe,

I WILL dream IT, I WILL do IT.

I AM A Disney Princess.



IT'S FUNNY HOW
SOME DISTANCE
MAKES EVERYTHING
SEEM SMALL
AND THE FEARS THAT ONCE
CONTROLLED ME
CAN'T GET TO ME AT ALL

IT'S TIME TO SEE
WHAT I CAN DO
TO TEST THE LIMITS AND
BREAK THROUGH
NO RIGHT, NO WRONG,
NO RULES FOR ME
I'M FREE!

—"Let It Go," *Frozen*

Elsa was born with the power to create ice and snow. When Anna and Elsa are little girls, Elsa turns one of the rooms in their castle into a giant winter playground with an ice rink, a snowman, and hills of snow. While the girls are playing, Anna jumps higher and higher into the air off pillars of snow Elsa creates to catch her. But Elsa can't keep up with Anna's reckless pace,



and she slips just as Anna is jumping off the highest pillar of all. Rushing to save her sister from falling, Elsa misses—and instead of catching Anna safely, she accidentally injures her with a blast of ice to the head.

Panicking, Elsa and Anna's parents take them to the woods to seek help from the trolls. Grand Pabbie, the leader of the trolls, heals Anna by erasing her memory and all knowledge of the event—and of Elsa's power. Grand Pabbie then warns Elsa and her parents that her powers come with beauty, but also great danger, and that Elsa's enemy will be fear. He tells Elsa that her powers will only grow stronger and that she must learn to control them. To protect Elsa, her father decides to shut the castle gates, limit her contact with others, and



hide her powers from everyone, including Anna, until Elsa learns to control them. Although her parents think they are doing what is right for her, their fear forces Elsa into a life of isolation. Instead of learning to use her powers and control them, Elsa's father teaches her to conceal them and not feel them. Elsa spends her entire childhood closed in her room, hidden from the world and terrified of her powers.

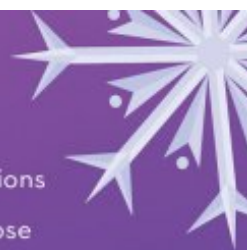
I think Elsa represents all of us. We live in a world that values perfection; therefore anything that makes us different is often looked at as a negative, setback, or obstacle to overcome. Just like Elsa, we are often taught to hide our differences in order not to be picked on or bullied. Or we are


often taught to avoid situations or activities that could expose our differences out of fear of getting hurt emotionally or physically.

Grand Pabbie gives Elsa and her parents some very valuable advice when he says, "Fear will be your enemy."

Elsa's parents think they are doing what is right by protecting Elsa from the fear of outsiders, but what they don't realize is that they are allowing their own fear, and Elsa's, to ruin her life. Elsa is living a life frozen by fear, and instead of learning to embrace the beauty of her powers, she sees only the danger in them.

When Elsa's powers are exposed to the entire kingdom,





of Arendelle, she runs away to the mountains and returns to seclusion. Realizing that her secret is now out, Elsa sings the song "Let It Go" and we watch as she transforms, releases her fear, and embraces her powers. I think part of the reason *Frozen* was such a worldwide phenomenon was that most everyone can relate to Elsa and "Let It Go." We all have something we try to hide or that we feel is a negative trait, attribute, or affliction. Elsa inspires us to let go of our fear and be free.

In order to transform, you must embrace everything about yourself: the good and the so-called bad. You must let go of the fear of what others may think and celebrate the beauty of what makes you different.



OK, NOW IT'S YOUR TURN TO
let it go!

ON A SEPARATE PIECE OF PAPER I WANT YOU TO WRITE DOWN YOUR FEARS AND DESCRIBE HOW THAT FEAR CONTROLS YOU. ONCE YOU'VE IDENTIFIED YOUR FEARS, LET THEM GO! I WANT YOU TO THROW THEM AWAY. GET RID OF THEM!

Let it go



MY *Happily* EVER AFTER

Love is a theme that makes an appearance in almost all Disney stories. Whether it's finding the love of your life or finding love with your family or friends, it's an important and essential part of each story. Tiana's dad makes her promise to never lose sight of what's really important in life, and that's love. And only an act of true love can thaw Anna's frozen heart, free Elsa from the imprisonment of her powers, and free Arendelle from an eternal winter.

I've always been a hopeless romantic, and I dreamed of finding my own Prince Charming, my happily ever after. As a little girl, I thought love was just about finding a boy; then, as I got older, I decided I wasn't going to wait around for a boy—I didn't think I needed love to pursue my dreams. Little did I realize that love is truly about sacrifice and learning to put others before yourself. No dream is complete without learning this lesson and learning to love.

I'm going to back up here, to the days before I was cast as Ahsoka Tano and before Her Universe, to when I met my true love, and all at once, everything looked different.



MY DREAM WOULDN'T BE
complete WITHOUT *you* IN IT.

—TIANA, *The Princess and the Frog*

David Eckstein grew up in Sanford, Florida, about thirty-five minutes north of where I grew up in Orlando. His parents were schoolteachers, and he was one of five kids. He and his family loved Disney, but most of all, David loved baseball. David's dream was to be a major-league baseball player when he grew up. The problem was that David grew to be only five feet, seven inches tall, and everyone told him he was too small to be a professional baseball player.

David defied the odds. In a real-life David-and-Goliath story, he made it to the major leagues in 2001 as the starting shortstop for the Anaheim Angels, a professional baseball team then owned by Disney.

Although we practically shared a hometown and had lived in Central Florida at the same time, I had never met David. However, we were both now living in Southern

California, and my friend Whitney thought we should meet. Whitney and I had been best friends since sixth grade, and she was like another sister to me. Whitney knew someone who knew David and told me that David and I had a lot in common. I trusted Whitney; David sounded like a great guy, and I really wanted to meet him. However, I had no idea how I was going to meet a major-league baseball player, so I brushed off the idea and thought, *Maybe one day...*



Later, I happened to go to an Angels game with some friends. As I mentioned in a previous chapter, my favorite number is twenty-two. That was David Eckstein's number, so my friend bought me his jersey to wear to the game.

We had front-row seats right next to the Angels dugout. I was rooting for David during the game since I was wearing his shirt and remembered that we were from neighboring towns. Halfway through the game, David stood on the top step of the dugout to greet a teammate who had just scored, and I looked over to watch the celebration. I just so happened to lock eyes with David, and we stared at each other for about five seconds. It wasn't romantic. It was more awkward than anything, but I couldn't believe it.

I'd just made eye contact with the guy that my best friend wanted me to meet. Was it a sign?

Probably not. He seemed like a nice guy, and I was sure we really would have a lot in common, but I still had no idea how I was going to meet him. How does one even go about meeting a famous baseball player? So I enjoyed watching him play, but once again, I brushed off the idea of meeting him.

A month later I had a film premiere to go to, and my publicist suggested I bring a date. I didn't have a boyfriend, but Whitney suggested that I invite David Eckstein to be my date. I went back to my publicist and said, "You are going to think I'm crazy, but there's this guy who plays baseball for the Angels, and we're from the same area. We know some of the same people, and my best friend thinks we'd make a good couple. Maybe you could call the Angels and see if he would be my date."

She thought it was a fun idea and sent an e-mail to the Angels. I went home, super embarrassed that I'd even asked her to do that! The next day, I got a call from my publicist. She said, "Guess what? David will be calling you tomorrow!" *What?!*

Somehow her e-mail had gotten to the head of media relations for the Angels, an incredible man named Tim Mead. He thought that David and I would make a good match because we had a lot in common, so he agreed to connect us. The next morning, I got a call from David Eckstein. He wouldn't agree to go to the film premiere just yet because he said he wasn't really the Hollywood type; he wanted to meet me first. It was already Saturday then, and the premiere was on Thursday, so we had only a few days to meet before the premiere.

There were still two weeks left in the baseball season, so in order to meet David, I'd go to one of his games and we would go out to dinner afterward. I was filming that week, and the only day I could drive down to Anaheim was Monday. The problem, and what I didn't tell him, was that Monday was my birthday. I didn't want him to think that I was purposely going out with him on my birthday, because I wasn't, but that was the only day that worked for both of us prior to the premiere.

Now, I need to give you a little backstory before you hear this next part. In fourth grade, my teacher, Mr. Holt, told the whole class that something special would happen to each of us on our "golden birthdays"—when the day and our age matched, like turning ten on the tenth or sixteen on the sixteenth. I know it may sound silly, but ever since fourth grade, I had been waiting for my golden birthday. I believed my teacher, and I just knew that something special would happen.



That Monday just so happened to be September 22, my twenty-second birthday, and David Eckstein was number twenty-two. We were having our first date on my golden birthday. If you're wondering, Mr. Holt was right. When you meet "the one," you just know, and David and I hit it off right away. We had a great first date and he agreed to go to the premiere with me.

We had been dating for about six weeks when I told him about the game I'd gone to and explained that we had actually made eye contact. He stopped me right then and there and proceeded to remember the exact details of what I'd been wearing and the group I'd been with. It turns out that the reason he remembered everything about me from that game was that in the history of his playing career, that had been the only time he'd ever looked into the stands. He had actually been mad at himself for doing that!



Prior to that fateful game, David had never broken focus and never looked into the crowd. He kept his eyes on the

field at all times, and he wasn't sure why he'd happened to look into the stands that day. It finally made sense, and it seemed that fate had played a part.

We got engaged at Disney World, and I ended up calling Mr. Holt. I reminded him about when he'd told the class that something special would happen on our golden birthdays. I let him know that it had. I told him that I'd had my first date with my future husband, and I thanked him for his prediction all those years ago.

David and I got married, and a month later I was cast as the voice of Ahsoka Tano. David was still playing baseball, but now he was in St. Louis, and I was still a full-time actress in LA. We traveled back and forth for a couple years and made it work, but eventually David signed with the Toronto Blue Jays. The distance and travel became too much. David was also dealing with some injuries and needed me to be there to go to doctor's appointments with him and help take care of him.

I was able to continue my work as Ahsoka, but not to keep up with my auditions in LA. Unfortunately, since I was no longer in the city, my agents and manager let me go.

I felt extremely down. I didn't want to give up on my dream and my career, but David needed me in Toronto, and I made a choice to be with him. This was when I truly understood love: it was time to put his needs before my own. I would just have to adjust my dream, forge a new path, and figure out what I could do that didn't require me to be in LA full-time. *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* had just premiered in theaters, and that's when I first started doing my research about female fans. Her Universe was still a distant dream in my mind, but David helped me turn my focus from myself to


the needs of others. He opened my heart even more to love and compassion, and I started to see the world differently.



I let go of my feelings of rejection and isolation and focused on making the most of my situation. Instead of looking at what I couldn't do for myself, I took a step back and looked at what I could do for others, and my dream finally made sense.

David has become my best friend, my confidant, and my support. He helped me look at my dreams differently, and he showed me what true love is all about. I could not have transformed Her Universe into what it is today without him by my side. You must allow love into your heart. It doesn't have to be with a spouse; it can be with a family member, a friend, your teammates, or even a cause. Putting something or someone before yourself will help you find your *why* and give you the extra fuel you need to transform your dream into a reality.





ALL AT ONCE *everything*
LOOKS DIFFERENT
NOW THAT I *see* YOU.

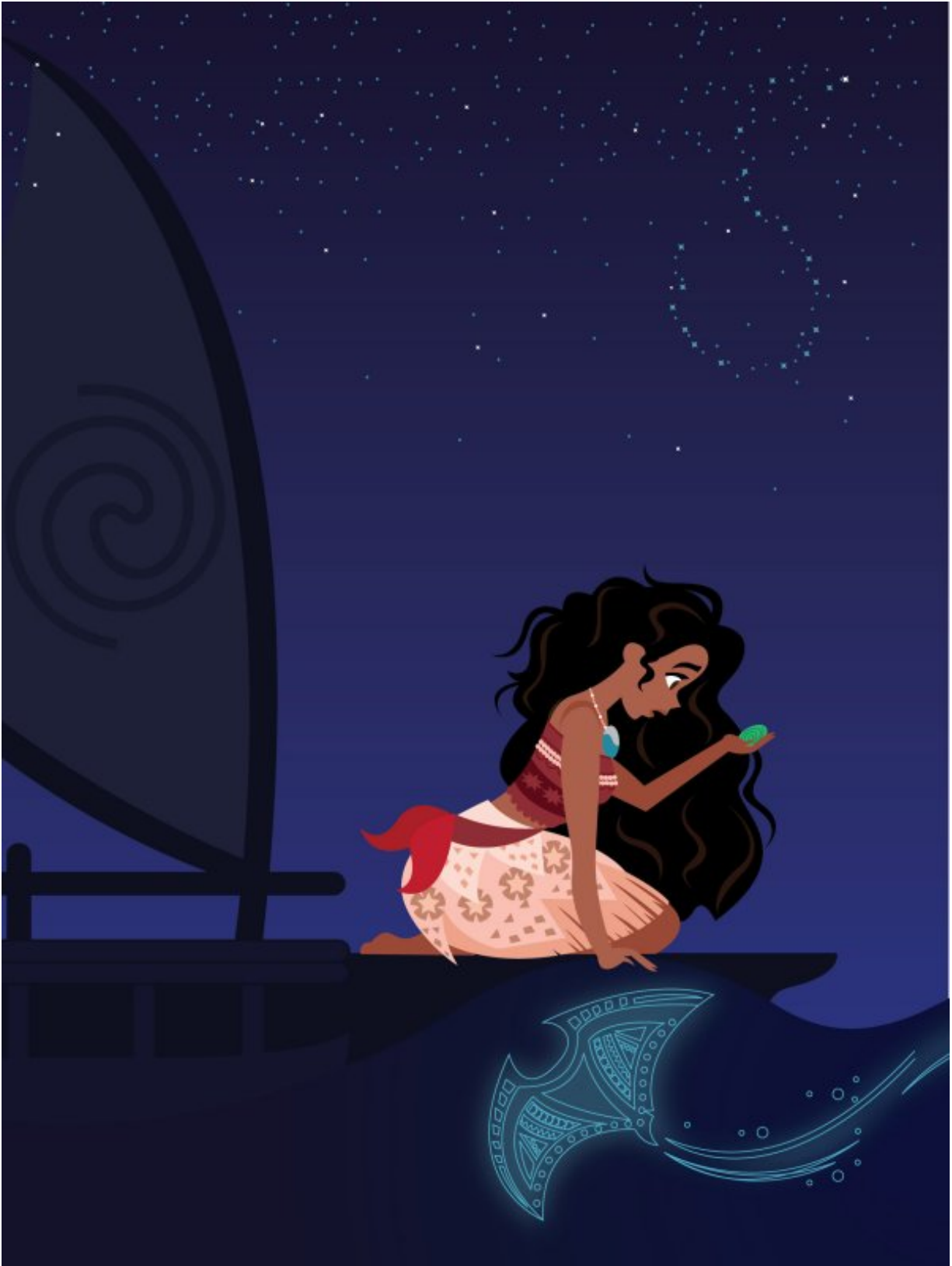
-*"I SEE THE LIGHT," Tangled*

You WERE MY NEW DREAM.

-EUGENE FITZHERBERT, *Tangled*

AND *you* WERE MINE.

-RAPUNZEL, *Tangled*



Chapter 5



**I KNOW A GIRL FROM AN ISLAND
SHE STANDS APART FROM THE CROWD
SHE LOVES THE SEA AND HER PEOPLE
SHE MAKES HER WHOLE FAMILY PROUD
SOMETIMES THE WORLD SEEMS AGAINST YOU
THE JOURNEY MAY LEAVE A SCAR
BUT SCARS CAN HEAL AND REVEAL JUST
WHERE YOU ARE**

—GRAMMA TALA, “I AM MOANA (SONG OF THE ANCESTORS),”

Moana

Ever since Moana can remember, she has had a silent voice that calls her. A voice that calls her to the ocean and to her destiny. When she's a little girl, she doesn't know why she is so drawn to the ocean, but it keeps calling to her. Moana's father forbids Moana to leave their island, Motunui, and tells her that her destiny is to stay and be the chief of their people.

Still, the voice calls Moana to sail the ocean and explore where the sky meets the sea. When Moana defies her father and sets sail to see what is beyond the reef, her boat overturns and she almost dies. Moana's grandmother finds her, and Moana confesses what she has done. She then decides that her father is right, and she tells Gramma Tala that she is ready to take her rightful place as the chief of her people. But Gramma Tala knows Moana better than the young girl knows herself, and when she senses Moana's hesitation, she lets her in on the secret of who she is meant to be.

She shows Moana a hidden cave where she discovers that her people were once voyagers, but that they stopped voyaging to protect their people from the darkness beyond the island. Gramma Tala shows Moana that the darkness is spreading to their beloved island of Motunui and that the ocean chose Moana when she was a little girl. It is now Moana's destiny to leave and save the island. Moana's grandmother passes away shortly after this revelation, but she promises Moana that she will always be with her.

We then watch Moana as she leaves her island, overcomes all the odds along the way, and comes close to saving her people and eliminating the darkness—only to be stopped by the fire demon Te Kā.

Alone and devastated, Moana tells the ocean to find someone else and gives up on her destiny. Then, out of nowhere, Gramma Tala shows up as a spirit to give Moana advice—and to take her home, if she wishes. But once again, Moana hesitates. Gramma Tala reminds Moana to listen to the voice inside her and asks her, “Do you know who you are?”

This is when everything clicks for Moana. She realizes that it’s not the ocean calling her—it’s the voice inside her that calls to her, and if she listens to that voice, she’ll always know the way.

Finding her true identity and inner strength, Moana goes on to stop the spreading darkness and save her island. She becomes the chief of her people and returns them to their voyaging ways.

We are all like Moana. We all have a voice inside of us that calls us to our destiny. It’s up to you whether you choose to listen to and trust the voice inside of you. The world and people around you will affect your journey, both positively and negatively, but it’s up to you and only you to control your destiny. You just have to trust yourself and the voice inside.

***What is the voice inside calling you to do?
Who is the voice inside calling you to be?
Write down what your voice is telling you. It’s
OK if you don’t hear the voice right away; it
takes practice to silence the outside voices
around you and listen only to yourself.***



Another word for your internal voice is your conscience. Your conscience is the voice that speaks to you, that guides you, that tells you right from wrong.

Jiminy Cricket famously tells Pinocchio, “When you get in trouble and you don’t know right from wrong...when you meet temptation and the urge is very strong...always let your conscience be your guide.” Another way to put it is “Trust your gut.” My mom always used to tell me, “When in doubt, trust your gut.” Your conscience and your gut feeling are the same thing.

ALWAYS LET YOUR *conscience*
BE YOUR *guide*.

–JIMINY CRICKET, *Pinocchio*

You already have the answers inside of you, and your conscience will not lead you astray. However, heed this warning from someone who knows: every time I went against my gut feeling, every time I silenced that voice in my head and did the opposite of what it told me, it backfired on me. Every time.

Listening to your gut feeling is not always easy. Your conscience will always tell you to do the right thing, which often means taking the longer or harder path. Most people are tempted by the shorter, faster, and easier path. You will constantly be challenged by those around you to ignore your conscience and take the easy path, or what appears to be the only way out. However, *beware*, because if it looks too good to be true, it usually is.

Almost every Disney character is tempted in one way or another on their journey. We especially watch this temptation unfold when it comes to Ariel in *The Little Mermaid*. Ariel dreams of living a life on land, and after saving Prince Eric's life, she falls in love with him. When her father, King Triton, finds out, he forbids her from any further contact with the human world.

Ariel is devastated. Then she is visited by Flotsam and Jetsam, the evil sea witch Ursula's eels. They tell her that Ursula can help her. Immediately, Ariel says no. Her inner voice and conscience tell her that receiving help from Ursula is dangerous. However, her desire to be with Prince Eric overpowers her inner voice. She ignores her gut feeling and gives in to temptation.

Ursula offers to turn Ariel into a human for three days. If Ariel can get Prince Eric to kiss her—and not just any kiss, but a kiss of true love—then Ariel will remain a human forever. But if she fails, she will turn back into a mermaid

and belong to Ursula. Of course, nothing is free, and Ursula lets Ariel know that the payment for turning her into a human is her voice. Ariel will have to get Prince Eric to fall in love with her without saying a single word!



Everything inside of Ariel tells her not to take this deal. It's obvious that it's a bad idea, but temptation triumphs over her conscience, and with her eyes shut and head turned, she signs the contract with Ursula.

As the movie unfolds, we see Ursula sabotage Ariel and make it impossible for her to kiss Prince Eric in three days. We watch as Ariel and her family and friends have to deal with the consequences of her actions and save her from Ursula's deal.

We are all tempted on a regular basis. Some temptations are insignificant, and some temptations are life changing. You will make mistakes, and that's OK. Be sure to learn from your mistakes so you don't make them again. In Ariel's case, though, her mistake is a big one. If not for her family and friends who are there to save her, giving in to Ursula's

temptation would ruin her life. Ariel doesn't listen to the gut feeling that tells her no, and the results are disastrous. Next time you are staring temptation in the face, make sure to listen to your inner voice, and it will guide you to do the right thing.

When running a business, the temptation to ignore your gut feeling often comes up in regards to financial decisions. Whenever I've tried to cut corners, go cheap, or sacrifice quality for the sake of making more money, it has always backfired. Any decisions that have to do with money will always be tempting or challenging. I just advise you to really listen to your gut. If it doesn't feel right, it's not right; don't do it.



One thing I'm most proud of with Her Universe is how we've stayed true to our mission and community over the years. We set a very strong foundation for Her Universe. We knew what we were about, what we stood for, and who we were. I worked extremely hard to keep Her Universe a positive and safe environment for all ages.

We and our businesses now exist in a world where success is often associated with how many followers or views we have on social media. If we have more followers, we can have more business opportunities. In order to grow our community faster, I was advised to be less wholesome, but I would have been ignoring our core values.

It was never about the likes or views for me. It was always about the trust I had built with our community. Trust from our fans and followers is something that is earned and something that I hold dearly. I'll take trust over a like any day.

Finally, treat others the way you want to be treated.

Your conscience will always be your guide when it comes to how to treat others. Have you ever heard the phrase "You meet the same people on the way up as you do on the way down"? It means that if you treat people badly as you're rising through the ranks, it's likely you'll see them again if and when you stumble. And they will remember how you behaved.

It's very important to treat everyone with respect and kindness, because you never know who you are going to be working with from one day to the next. Even though some people may be more popular or have more clout at a given time, the truth is, status is always changing, and we all have a right to be treated well. The attraction "it's a small world"

is not just for kids. It has a very simple yet powerful message that we all need to be reminded of from time to time.





IT'S A WORLD OF LAUGHTER, A WORLD OF TEARS
IT'S A WORLD OF HOPES AND A WORLD OF FEARS
THERE'S SO MUCH THAT WE SHARE
THAT IT'S TIME WE'RE AWARE
IT'S A SMALL WORLD AFTER ALL



OK, so after you *dream, wish, believe, do, and transform*, you have to *trust*. You have to trust in the process, you have to trust in yourself, and you have to trust that you'll be ready when opportunity comes calling.

***Visualize* YOUR DREAMS COMING TRUE**

One thing I like to do is visualize myself being successful.

I lie in bed at night, and before I go to sleep, I visualize a particular moment in my head and exactly how I want that moment to go. For example, every year at San Diego Comic-Con, we put on a “geek couture” fashion show that we strive to make feel like it’s straight out of New York Fashion Week. It’s a design competition show where twenty-five contestants create original geek couture designs inspired by anything that’s celebrated at San Diego Comic-Con. Two winning designers get the opportunity to design a collection with Her Universe for Hot Topic.

The first year we put on the show, I was terrified! It had been my idea to do this show in the first place, and I had convinced a lot of people to put their trust in me. It had taken two years to bring the show to life, and I’d never done a fashion show before! Several people questioned whether I could host the entire show by myself.



Every day, as the event neared, I felt the pressure mounting. Would anyone even come to our show? Or would I walk out onstage to an empty ballroom? Would people like the show? Would I forget all my lines?

I decided to start visualizing how I wanted the show to go. I visualized a full audience, I visualized a cheering crowd, I visualized remembering all my lines, and I visualized a successful show. The day of the show, the prep work was done, rehearsals went well, and we just had to trust that the show would be a success. There was no room for doubt. When they announced my name, I was ready to walk onstage, because I had imagined this moment in my head over and over.

The show went exactly as I had visualized.

It's your turn. I want you to close your eyes and visualize a moment exactly how you want it to go. It could be you scoring the final goal with the game on the line, or maybe breaking a record, or acing a test, or singing a solo perfectly to an audience who gives you a standing ovation. Whatever your heart desires, visualize that moment, and then when it arrives, you'll be ready! On a piece of paper, write down what you saw so you'll remember it.



THIS WAS MY
FIRST GEEK
COUTURE LOOK.



***Confidence* IS YOUR BEST ACCESSORY!**

While running a fashion brand, I often get asked for fashion advice. I always say that confidence is the best accessory. You can pull off any outfit with confidence, and I tell people to never leave the house without it. However, confidence is more than just a fashion accessory; it's like your armor or your shield. Confidence can truly make you indestructible.

Sure, you will encounter problems or face daily battles, but confidence is the ultimate superpower that will enable you to overcome anything.

However, confidence is a learned skill, and one that will grow stronger with practice. It's OK and expected to feel unsure in the beginning. The more you do something, the more confident you will feel in your skills. Walt Disney once said, "We have confidence in our ability to do it right. And we work hard to do the best possible job."



IT TAKES ALL THE *running*
YOU CAN DO, TO KEEP IN THE
SAME PLACE. IF YOU WANT
TO GET *somewhere* ELSE,
YOU MUST RUN AT LEAST
twice as fast AS THAT!

-THE RED QUEEN, *Through the Looking-Glass*



Confidence plays a huge role in trust. You gain confidence when you trust yourself, and it becomes easier to trust yourself when you put in the work. Once you dream, wish, believe, do, and transform, you have to trust in yourself that you have done everything possible. Then it will become easier to confidently pursue your dreams. Your confidence will grow when you have confidence in your abilities, and that's when the impossible becomes possible!

DON'T FORGET THE *Fun*

Another part of trusting in the process is remembering to have fun. No matter how much you love what you do, just as we learn in *Star Wars*, there must be a balance in the Force.

I'm not going to sugarcoat this: making your dreams come true takes a lot of hard work. I always cringe when I hear the phrase "overnight success," because behind every success story is an incredible amount of work that did not happen overnight. We live in a society that glorifies success but often downplays or ignores the details of what it took to get there.



Someone once told me that it takes five years to build a successful business, and I found that to be true. However, when building Her Universe, I almost lost myself in my journey before the five-year mark. Years three to five of Her Universe were a make-it-or-break-it time for the business. Every day mattered. There was no time off, and I mean *no* time off. I worked seven days a week, every week, for three years straight.

With that came sacrifice. It was lonely. I barely ever saw my family or friends. I missed out on most of the parties and birthdays, and even some holidays.

There wasn't a day that went by when I wasn't writing at least one e-mail or monitoring social media like a hawk to make sure everyone was happy with their orders and experiences with Her Universe. My computer and phone were chained to my hip. I was pretty much working from the time I woke up to the time I went to bed. Sure, I stopped to eat or do an occasional workout, but my phone was still by my side as I checked e-mails between bites or push-ups.



I tell you all of this for two reasons: I want to paint a real picture of the level of commitment and work it took to make my dream come true, but I also want to encourage you to find time for yourself and have fun.

After three years of nonstop work, I was wiped out. As you have read in this book, I am a major fangirl and I love what I do, but I wasn't stopping to enjoy the journey. I was living my dream, but as the famous phrase goes, I never stopped to smell the roses. I almost forgot how to have fun.

So I made a change. I made myself take one day a week to do whatever I wanted. I took a day off to go to Disney World or perfect a new recipe. Sometimes I spent the whole day on the couch in my pajamas, binge-watching my favorite shows. So be prepared to put in the hard work, but don't forget to have fun in the process.

Make your fun list. On a piece of paper, write down some things you want to do for fun, and

then make the time to do them!



IT'S OK TO THROW A *Pity Party*

Where there are highs, there are lows. Trusting the process means understanding that sometimes things just don't go your way, and it's OK to throw your hands up in the air and hide away from the world for a moment. One thing I like to do is turn up the music really loud and have my own dance party. I definitely look completely crazy, but I let all my frustrations out and just dance. My song of choice is "The Middle" by Jimmy Eat World.

WHAT'S YOUR *dance* PARTY SONG?

Another thing I like to do is throw myself a pi-tea party. Get it? Instead of a pity party, it's a pi-tea party. (Just in case you're wondering, yes, I am a total cheeseball.) Tea parties have long been my go-to choice for relaxation, and they allow me to reset my mind.

RECIPE FOR THE PERFECT *Pi-tea Party*

Find your perfect tea mixture! I love to mix different tea flavors. I prefer black teas, and I often mix a chocolate tea

with a caramel tea, or a vanilla tea with chai. Don't be afraid to mix and match flavors. Be curious!

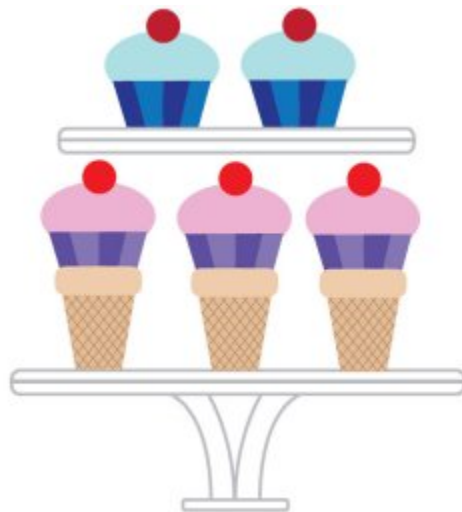
I prefer a little bit of cream and one sugar cube per cup of tea.



Try a peanut butter and jelly tea sandwich with Cheetos inside. This is a sandwich that the Mad Hatter and March Hare would be proud of! I've always loved both peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and Cheetos. One day in elementary school, I decided to combine them. It sounds like nonsense, but it's delicious! Cut the crust off and slice the sandwich into four triangles, and it will turn any frown upside down.



Have a cupcake cone. It's a cupcake in an ice-cream cone! Take your favorite cake recipe (I prefer yellow cake) and pour the cake mixture into ice-cream cones until they're each about two-thirds full. Place the ice-cream cones upright on a cookie sheet and bake them in the oven at 350 degrees for twenty to twenty-five minutes, or until you can stick a fork in one and it comes out dry. Let the cake cool. Once cooled, take the frosting of your choice (I prefer chocolate!) and frost the tops of the cupcakes. You can then top off the frosted cupcakes with the toppings of your choice. I like rainbow sprinkles or crushed Oreo.



What would you *serve* at your pi-tea party?

When it comes to trust, one of the biggest lessons you have to learn is how to deal with change.

Change is a necessary part of growing, and sometimes it is hard to accept. From an outside perspective, Her Universe was booming by the time we hit year five of the business. It almost felt like we had made the jump to hyperspace and were growing and expanding at lightspeed. Everything I had dreamed of for Her Universe was coming true.



ALWAYS IN *motion* **IS**
THE FUTURE.

-**YODA**, *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*

However, behind the scenes, we were not able to keep up with the growth. We were a small company trying to keep up with big businesses, and we were not set up for success. Then one day I received a call from Cindy Levitt, one of the executives from Hot Topic. She said that they loved working with Her Universe but felt they could do so much more with us if they acquired the company.

I was shocked. Never in a million years had I expected this call.

This was not something I had ever thought about. I owned Her Universe; it was my company, my baby, and I had never considered selling it. However, Her Universe was not just my universe. It was *our* universe, a community for fans, and I had to take a step back and look at what was best for everyone, not just myself.

IF YOU HAD THE *chance*
TO CHANGE YOUR FATE,
would YOU?

-MERIDA, *Brave* (movie trailer)



Was this fate? Or a bad idea? My back was up against a wall. I could see all this opportunity on the other side, but I did not have the support or infrastructure to take hold of it. There were fans all over the world who wanted to be a part of Her Universe, but I wouldn't be able to cater to them unless I was able to grow the business. Just like Moana, I listened to my inner voice, and my gut feeling told me to go for it. This new opportunity with Hot Topic was calling me. This change was scary, but it appeared that the opportunities were endless. Then I remembered a quote from George Bernard Shaw: "Progress is impossible without change."

He was right. It was time for change, and I needed to accept that in order to do what was best for our community, I'd have to take a risk and venture outside my safe zone.

In October of 2016, we became part of the Hot Topic family of brands, and I continued to run Her Universe. It was one of the best decisions I ever made. It opened up new doors and gave Her Universe the opportunity to reach fans around the world, and it also allowed us to expand and cater to men and boys with a new brand called Our Universe.

NEVER GIVE UP *Hope*

Finally, with trust, you must always have hope. There is a quote at the beginning of each *Clone Wars* episode. Some fans call them “fortune cookies,” and these quotes are inspired by the lesson or theme of each episode.

“Never give up hope, no matter how dark things seem” is the fortune cookie at the beginning of “The Wrong Jedi,” the episode where my character, Ahsoka Tano, walks away from the Jedi Order. Ahsoka has been framed for murder by her friend Barriss Offee and then abandoned by the Jedi Council. After going on trial and being convicted for a crime she didn’t commit, Ahsoka’s trust in everything she’s ever known is gone. The verdict is overturned when Barriss admits to her crime, and Ahsoka is freed and welcomed back into the Jedi Order. But the damage is done.



NEVER GIVE UP *hope.*
NO MATTER HOW
DARK THINGS SEEM.

–“THE WRONG JEDI,” *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*

Ahsoka shocks the *Star Wars* universe when she turns down their offer and walks down the steps of the Jedi Temple to an unknown future.

To me, *Star Wars* has always represented hope, but now Ahsoka Tano has become a beacon of hope for *Star Wars* fans around the world. Despite living through some very dark times in *The Clone Wars* and *Star Wars Rebels*, she teaches us to never lose hope. She has become a symbol of light. As I sit here and reflect, I would not be writing this book if it weren't for Ahsoka Tano. While Disney set the foundation and core of who I am, Ahsoka and *Star Wars* turned me into the person I am today.

THIS IS ME IN COSTUME,
COSPLAYING MY CHARACTER
AHSOKA TANO.



As a young girl growing up in the Jedi Temple, Ahsoka *dreams* and *wishes* that one day she will become a Jedi. She trains hard and *believes* that she can. When she becomes Anakin Skywalker's Padawan and fights in the Clone Wars, the only way to prove herself is to *do* it. We watch and root for Ahsoka as she *transforms* from a student to a leader, and we are inspired at the heart-wrenching moment when Ahsoka *trusts* in herself and her conscience and chooses to walk away from the Jedi Order. Then Ahsoka gives us hope when she shows up in *Star Wars Rebels* as a leader of the Rebellion.

And this brings us right back to the Ahsoka quote from the beginning of the book: "This is a new day, a new beginning."

I hope this is a new day and a new beginning for you. It's my wish that I've been able to give to you what Disney and *Star Wars* gave to me: the belief that if you...

Dream

Wish

Believe

Do

Transform

&

Trust

...then anything is possible.

Now go.

IT'S YOUR
UNIVERSE,

AND YOU HAVE THE **POWER**
TO MAKE IT HAPPEN!

Acknowledgments

A Special Thank-You...

To my parents, Sharon and Tony Drane, for teaching me how to Dream It and Be It.

To my husband, David, for being more than my rock; you are my cornerstone.

To my Skyguy, Dave Filoni, for creating Ahsoka and for choosing me.

To our Her Universe community, for being my *why*. Always remember to *Dream Your World, Be Your World, Flaunt Your World*.



shluy Echstein
Asoka Tano